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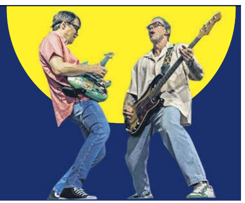

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Racism and sexism normalised in UK, says equalities minister

Exclusive Reform and Tory politicians help fuel bigotry, says Phillipson

Kiran Stacey
Policy editor

Racism and sexism have become normalised in Britain, the equalities minister has said, warning young men were being sucked into violent misogyny by a social media "cesspit".

Bridget Phillipson said she was increasingly worried about how commonplace misogyny and racism had become, fuelled by online interactions and statements by politicians that she said would not have been acceptable a few years ago. She accused senior Conservative and Reform MPs of having made racist remarks, and accused the police of not taking violence against women and girls seriously enough.

Speaking to the Guardian's Politics Weekly podcast, she said: "I worry that we are at kind of a ground zero in terms of attitudes around violence against women and girls. Things that not very long ago felt totally unacceptable are becoming normal.

"I think we're seeing that in terms of attitudes towards women, and I think we see that in terms of attitudes around racism."

She accused the shadow justice secretary, Nick Timothy, and Reform's economic spokesperson, Robert Jenrick, of having made racist statements in recent years.

Earlier this year, Timothy called Muslims praying in Trafalgar Square an "act of domination", while Jenrick came under fire in October after the Guardian revealed he had complained he "didn't see another white face" on a trip to an area of Birmingham.

◀ *The minister, Bridget Phillipson, accused senior Reform and Tory politicians of making racist remarks*

"We've had pretty despicable things that the likes of Robert Jenrick have said in the past on his visit to Birmingham," she said. "We had Nick Timothy, who said some appalling things about Muslim prayer. Apparently I'm calling him names when I say that's racist. I think it is fundamentally racist because I don't think he would say that about any other group."

Neither Reform nor the Tories responded to requests for comment.

Labour has been accused in recent years of shying away from criticising statements by Reform and Conservative MPs for fear

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Night of strikes on Kyiv kills at least 15

Dan Sabbagh
Kyiv

A heavy Russian missile and drone bombardment killed at least 15 people around Kyiv yesterday in one of the biggest aerial attacks on Ukraine's capital since the start of the war.

Vitali Klitschko, the city's mayor, said homes, a school and a children's medical centre were among the buildings damaged in an attack that began at about midnight on Wednesday and continued into yesterday afternoon.

Fifteen people were reported killed in the city, Klitschko said, while other authorities said 33 had been injured.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said: "It was a massive attack - the Russians had been preparing for a long time, combining different types of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and drones, aiming to cause as much damage as possible to civilian infrastructure."

Explosions could be heard from the city centre within minutes of the first warning at 11.51pm on Wednesday, earlier than

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▲ *Emergency services outside a burning shop in the Ukrainian capital* PHOTOGRAPH: KOSTIANTYN LIBEROV/LIBKOS/GETTY IMAGES

GCSE resits criticised after pass rates slump

Richard Adams
Sally Weale

The government's plans to make young people continue studying maths and English if they fail GCSEs could be demotivating and ineffective, according to education experts and school leaders after retake pass rates slumped this year.

Only one in seven students in the age group retaking GCSE maths after a previous failure got a grade 4 or above this summer, while only one in six managed to pass English, meaning that the majority will have to retake the exams again next year if they remain in education or training.

The lower than expected results for older students were part of a rosier national picture as students in year 11 got record high grades in GCSE examinations across England.

While seven in 10 of 16-year-olds got passing grades in maths and English, the remainder of the 620,000 year 11 students will face retakes next year after they failed to reach a grade 4.

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News

University suspends man who accused Arday of plagiarism

Chris Osuh

Nathan Cofnas, the academic who made plagiarism allegations against Prof Jason Arday, who was found dead last week, has been suspended by a university.

Arday, 41, resigned from his role at the University of Cambridge this month after coverage of Cofnas's accusations. The plagiarism allegations, which were not proved in any formal investigation, triggered questions about Arday's achievements. There has been criticism of Cambridge, but also of some of the media coverage. The university chancellor, Chris Smith, described it as a “racist feeding frenzy”.

Arday, who became Cambridge's youngest black professor in 2023, was found dead at his home in Battersea, south London, last Friday.

The “American anti-woke” blogger Cofnas is a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University's department of philosophy and moral sciences, according to his website.

In a post on X yesterday, he said: “I am under investigation by my university for discriminating against Arday.” Mr Cofnas added in a separate post: “I was just suspended by Ghent University. They will almost certainly fire me.”

Ghent University officials confirmed his suspension after saying they had been “shocked” by Arday's death and that it “should prompt reflection”, adding that the institution “opposes discrimination, hatred and racism”.

In a joint statement on Wednesday, Ghent University's rector, Petra De Sutter, and vice-rector, Herwig Reynaert, said: “We attach great importance to academic freedom and to open academic debate, even when views are controversial. However, that freedom is not unlimited.

“It goes hand in hand with responsibility and may be restricted in order to protect the rights of others. For this reason, the university takes the recent public statements made by a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University regarding this matter very seriously. Ghent University has decided to take appropriate action within its powers and the applicable framework.”

▲ *Ghent University is looking into statements by Nathan Cofnas, right, about Jason Arday, left*

The rector and vice-rector said that, while it was “important to be transparent”, they did not want to “pre-empt any potential decisions at this stage”. In an update yesterday, a spokesperson said: “Ghent University formally notified the staff member concerned of the launch of a preliminary disciplinary investigation.

“As part of this process, the university is assessing whether there are sufficient grounds to refer the case to the competent disciplinary body for further consideration. Pending this preliminary investigation, Ghent University has suspended the staff member as a precautionary measure.”

Cofnas was sacked from his role at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 2024. In blog posts, he had said that in a meritocracy “blacks would disappear from almost all high-profile positions outside of sports and entertainment.”

In a piece titled “Don't Scapegoat Women”, published in January this year, Cofnas claimed “women but not men can get people fired by pointing and crying”.

He added: “To meet de facto quotas, employers have had to reach deeper into the pool of less qualified female candidates. For obvious reasons, affirmative action hires often have a chip on their shoulder.

“Many of them turn to social justice activism to distract from the fact that they aren't as good at their job as the straight white men who earned their position based on merit, or weren't hired at all.”

GCSE resits ‘simply not working’ as pass rates plunge

Continued *from page 1*

Lucy Powell, the education secretary, said the government would be sticking with plans for a new “stepping stone” qualification aimed at those who got a grade 2 or worse in their first attempt at GCSEs.

Powell described the current policy as “a hamster wheel” and told the Press Association yesterday: “There's got to be a better way to give young people the skills and confidence that they need to succeed, not just branding them a failure, and also allowing them to gain other qualifications that show they have a strong foundation in English and maths.

“So that's why I want to bring in a new level one qualification so they've got a strong foundation in English and maths that gives them that passport to go on for further study or an apprenticeship or a training place.”

But the plan, first announced in last year's skills white paper, has been greeted with scepticism by experts and school leaders, who warned that the number of young people not in education, employment or training (Neet) was likely to increase so long as GCSE failure rates remained high.

◀ *The picture was rosier for year 11 students, who got record high grades across England*
PHOTOGRAPH: JORDAN PETTITT/PA

Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: “This year's post-16 resit results reinforce the fact that the government policy of force-feeding them a relentless diet of GCSE English and maths in post-16 education is simply not working.

“Tinkering at the edges of the qualification system will not solve this problem. As long as we continue to grade students in this way in these gateway subjects of English and maths, we will continue to damage their future prospects.

“If the government is serious about tackling the Neet crisis it must grasp this nettle and rethink how we assess English and maths.”

Lee Elliot Major, a professor of social mobility at the University of Exeter, warned that the new qualification would “need a strong fairness test to ensure this doesn't create a two-tier system in which pupils from underresourced backgrounds are disproportionately directed onto lower-level routes.

“With around a third of young people not achieving the grade 4 benchmark in both English and maths, the system itself needs reform,” said Elliot Major.

The Department for Education's consultation positions the new “stepping stone” qualification as preparation for a later GCSE resit, meaning young people will still face multiple examinations while they remain in education.

Paul Whiteman, the leader of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: “We have long called for an end to the current policy which forces students into dispiriting rounds of repeated, demotivating resits.

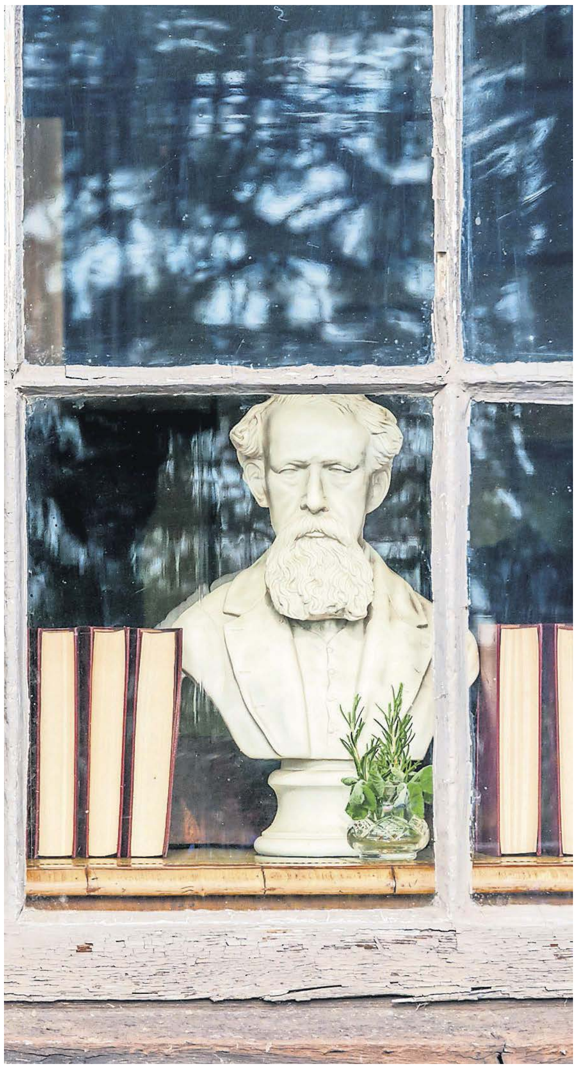
“What is needed are more appropriate and engaging alternatives to GCSEs in English and maths at key stage 4 which enable students to study for qualifications that better suit their needs and aspirations.”

For this year's 16-year-olds, the results revealed a strong performance in maths among boys in England, with a new high of 24% achieving grade 7 or above, while 20.5% of girls reached the same level. However, girls maintained their lead in top grades across all subjects, with 25.5% of exam entries being awarded 7s or above compared with 20.7% for boys.

The proportion of exam results at the top grade, 9, remained at 5.2%, unchanged from 2025.

GCSEs in England award grades on a scale of 9 to 1, while many in Northern Ireland and Wales continue to award letter grades with A* at the peak. Education policy is devolved to UK national governments, making it difficult to directly compare GCSE results between them owing to different content, marking and regulation.

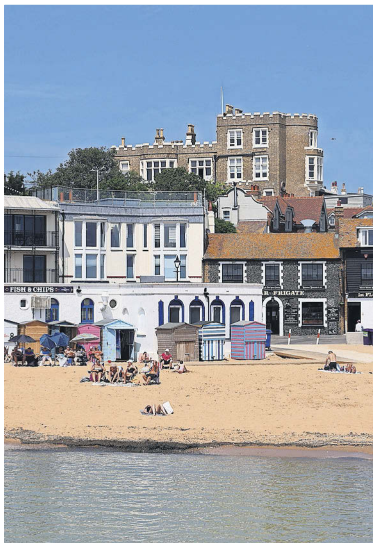
In Northern Ireland, 31.5% of entries by 16-year-olds gained As or 7s and above, a slight improvement over last year, while 84.4% gained Cs or 4s and above. In Wales, 20.2% of grades for 16-year-olds were awarded As or better, and 63.7% of entries gained at least a C, slightly below the 2025 pass rate.



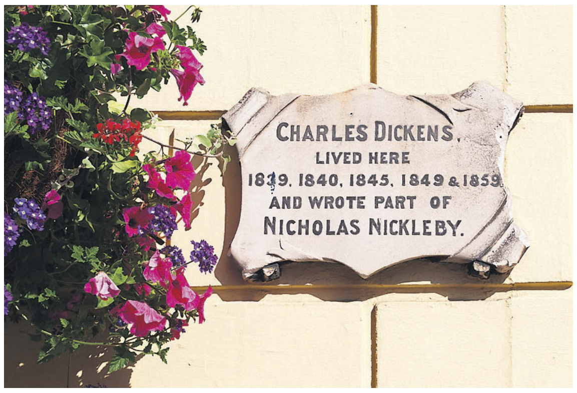
▼ *Winterbourne on the Isle of Wight, where Dickens turned a waterfall into an outdoor shower. Bottom and left, Broadstairs was a favourite spot*

Winterbourne
CHARLES DICKENS
MYLES BIRKET FOSTER
WILLIAM ADAMS

PHOTOGRAPHS: KATHERINE DA SILVA/SHUTTERSTOCK; URBANIMAGES/ALAMY



▲ *The Broadstairs holiday home where Dickens spent his summers for more than 20 years, now known as Bleak House, dominates the skyline*



'A gentlemanly vagabond': what Dickens did on holiday

Caroline Davies

It's summer in the city, the pubs are crowded and the coast beckons. With five heatwaves so far, it is a fair description of this holiday season.

But the same was true of the much less frequent hot, dry summers of the past, including 186 years ago when Charles Dickens put pen to paper in anticipation of escaping London for the sea breeze in Broadstairs, Kent.

"There is no news in London – everybody is hurrying out of town – the two great theatres are shut up – and all the watering places are crammed with hot people," he wrote to his brother Alfred on 12 August 1840.

His letter, which is to go on public display for the first time, is one of several items of correspondence shedding light on Dickens and his holiday pursuits, from picnics on the Thames, beach showering on the Isle of Wight, and being ravaged by mosquitoes and other insects.

"While Dickens rarely slowed down, he made sure to find time for holidays and days off, packing up plenty of his belongings and heading to the Kent coast or the West Country," said Emma Harper, the deputy director of the Charles Dickens Museum, London, where the letters will go on display in the study where he wrote Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby and The Pickwick Papers.

"While Dickens loved London, he was very happy to escape its crowded hot pubs for the cooler climes of the coast, or if he decided to break his routine by taking a spur of the moment day off, he would consider this a holiday. He … sometimes even brought his favourite pieces of furniture along so he could write from the chair and desk that suited him best."

> *'I see myself astride a mule, and not caring for the clock, the day of the month, or the day of the week'*
>
> **Charles Dickens**

Dickens positively gloated about his successful mission to construct an outdoor shower cubicle near his "very pretty" holiday cottage in Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight in 1849, expressing no qualms about spoiling the view for others.

He wrote to the printer William Bradbury: "We have made all visitors in search of the picturesque, mad, by putting up an immense wooden caravan on the beach, to shut in a noble waterfall and convert it into a shower bath! With some five hundred feet of fall. Which we take, every morning, to the unbounded astonishment of the aboriginal inhabitants."

Of an 1851 trip on the Thames with his son Charley "and three other young Eton shavers", he promised that if his friend Thomas Beard were to join them, he would be "armed with a hamper from Fortnum & Mason's". They could dine on a bank, "and if you can come, you and I will console ourselves for our antiquity, after dinner, with a trifle of tobacco and champagne".

Dickens "relaxed energetically", said Harper, and he loved to travel. To his biographer John Forster he wrote of a 1842 trip to Italy: "I see myself in a striped shirt, moustache, blouse, red sash, straw hat, and white trousers, sitting astride a mule, and not caring for the clock, the day of the month, or the day of the week."

Reflecting on one long excursion, he told Beard in 1845 of "the gentlemanly vagabond I have been, for the last six or eight months – the extraordinary beds I have slept in – and the bewildering amount of fleas, mosquitoes, bugs, and other insects I have unwillingly bepastured – these things have hardly left me any leisure in my holiday, until within the last four or five weeks. During the whole of which time I have been employed, chiefly, in lying on my back on sofas, and leaning out of windows and over balconies, in a sort of mild intoxication."

Summer in the City With Charles Dickens runs from 26 August to 27 September

AI GP receptionist speaks 18 languages – but not Yorkshire

Mark Brown
North of England correspondent

Patients in a South Yorkshire town are frustrated by an AI GP receptionist not understanding their "broad accents", a health watchdog has said.

Healthwatch Rotherham, a local health and social care watchdog, said a number of practices in the area had introduced a new AI receptionist called Emma. It said it was hearing accounts of the AI not understanding local accents.

Its manager, Kym Gleeson, told the BBC: "One of the issues is this system can't always understand what people's inquiry is about due to their broad Yorkshire accent.

"Across South Yorkshire, accents do vary quite a lot. There are different twangs so there's a lot of variation. It seems the system isn't always able to understand, so that causes frustration."

The system, which is being used by an increasing number of GP surgeries across the UK, aims to answer every patient call "instantly", eliminating the often long waiting times to speak to a receptionist.

Gleeson said Emma had the potential to be a good system, but one disgruntled patient told Healthwatch: "I could never get it to understand me, I ended up just hanging up and not bothering to try and book an appointment."

The feedback came after the watchdog contacted groups representing older people and veterans' communities, Gleeson said. "What they were telling us was they were having issues navigating this system.

> *'I could never get it to understand me. I had to hang up and not make an appointment'*
>
> **Would-be patient**
> *South Yorkshire*

"Some of the people were so frustrated at not being able to understand how to navigate this AI system, it was forcing them to travel back to their GP surgery in person. The usual route of using a telephone was no longer a comfortable process for them."

Healthwatch said concerns around Emma were heightened when considering people less confident about using digital technology, or people with disabilities. "It's important to remember that GP practices still have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for patients who need them," it said.

"If using an AI receptionist is difficult for you, you can ask your practice what alternative ways are available to access services."

QuantumLoopAI, the company behind the Emma system, said it was designed to understand a range of dialects, and that patients were able to request a transfer to a human being at any point.

A spokesperson told the BBC: "Emma does not make clinical decisions. She is designed and trained to understand a wide range of accents and dialects and supports 17 languages in addition to English.

"Where she is unable to understand or deal with a patient's request the call is transferred to the reception team.

"No caller is required to continue speaking with Emma, and anyone can ask to speak to a member of staff at any time.

"Emma is designed to improve access by answering calls instantly and removing telephone queues."

A woman is helped out of a block of flats in Kyiv. A children's medical centre and a school were also hit PHOTOGRAPH: SERGEY DOLZHENKO/EPA

Night of Russian missile strikes on Kyiv leaves 15 dead and dozens injured

As residents of the capital surveyed the damage, the president again urged a global response to the attacks PHOTOGRAPH: JULIA KOCHETOVA/THE GUARDIAN

Continued *from page 1*

the normal timing of Russian missile strikes. A further wave of attacks followed after 6am yesterday, and drone threats continued throughout the morning.

Ukraine's air force said Russia had launched dozens of ballistic, cruise and hypersonic missiles and 168 drones in the overnight attack. Later it reported shooting down 41 out of 46 cruise missiles and 145 drones, although none of an unspecified number of high-speed ballistic missiles were intercepted.

The aftermath of one of the most intense nights of missile strikes on Kyiv, amid a shortage of Patriot interceptors PHOTOGRAPH: SERGEY DOLZHENKO/EPA

A shortage of Patriot interceptors means that Ukraine is struggling to defend itself from high-speed ballistics, which can arrive within minutes of an air-raid warning. This month the air force stopped announcing how many ballistics had been launched, citing security concerns.

Eight people were reported killed in the Solomianskyi district to the west of the centre of the capital. A block of flats in a residential area was struck and flats on the top floor destroyed, killing two, rescuers said.

An empty building, sometimes used informally as a shelter, in the middle of a car park was destroyed in a strike at around midnight. Nobody was reported killed, though several cars were burnt out.

Oleksandr, a car park attendant, was on duty and escaped with light injuries. In the morning, still shocked, covered in cuts, his shorts torn into strips, he waited by his destroyed booth and said he could not remember what had happened to him immediately after the blast.

Andriy, 57, a driver, said he was in his vehicle when the strike on the building in the car park took place. He believed his life was saved by tinted plastic sheeting he had stuck on his car windows. "I was only scratched on the back of my head," he added.

There was no sign of any military or industrial activity in the area. The car park was used by residents of nearby apartment blocks, and the non-residential buildings largely disused.

Zelenskyy urged a global response to the attacks. "While Moscow is investing in ballistic missiles and escalation, such strikes do not always receive the response they should. And as long as Ukraine does not have enough anti-ballistic defence, Russia will not consider peace seriously," Zelenskyy said on social media.

An attack in Brovary district in the wider Kyiv region killed one man and wounded another, said the regional governor, Tymur Tkachenko. "One industrial facility has been damaged. All relevant services are on site, working to extinguish the fire," he said.

Warehouses in Boryspil, east of Kyiv, were also attacked, including a facility operated by the Ukrainian Red Cross, the prime minister, Sergiy Koretsky, said.

Both sides have been escalating long-range attacks while air defences remain short. Ukraine has attacked oil refineries and warehouses near Moscow using newly developed cruise missiles and drones, while Russia has stepped up its attacks on Kyiv.

The Ukrainian air force said Kinzhal and Zircon hypersonic missiles were used in the latest attack, as well as Iskander and North Korean KN-23 ballistic missiles, sea-launched Kalibr cruise missiles and Shahed drones.

Ukraine's air force had earlier warned of Russian Kalibr missiles passing over Kaharlyk and heading towards Kyiv. Eight missiles had been launched from warships in the Black Sea, though all were shot down.

Romania's defence ministry said radar systems had detected aerial targets near the Ukrainian border overnight, prompting the scrambling of two Spanish fighter jets deployed on Nato missions and a Romanian air force helicopter. The ministry said a drone had entered Romanian airspace near Galati before crashing in an unpopulated area.

Poland's military command said it had mobilised aircraft and activated air defences aimed at protecting Polish airspace, particularly in areas bordering Ukraine.

Russia also reported a large Ukrainian drone attack. Moscow's mayor, Sergei Sobyanin, said 250 drones had flown towards the Moscow region between Wednesday night and yesterday morning, and that most had been destroyed far from the capital.

Moscow confirmed on Wednesday that Russia was importing refined petroleum products to try to stabilise supply following Ukraine's attacks on its refineries. Reuters used industry contacts and market data to establish that a tanker from India had recently arrived, while supplies were also being sourced from east Asia.

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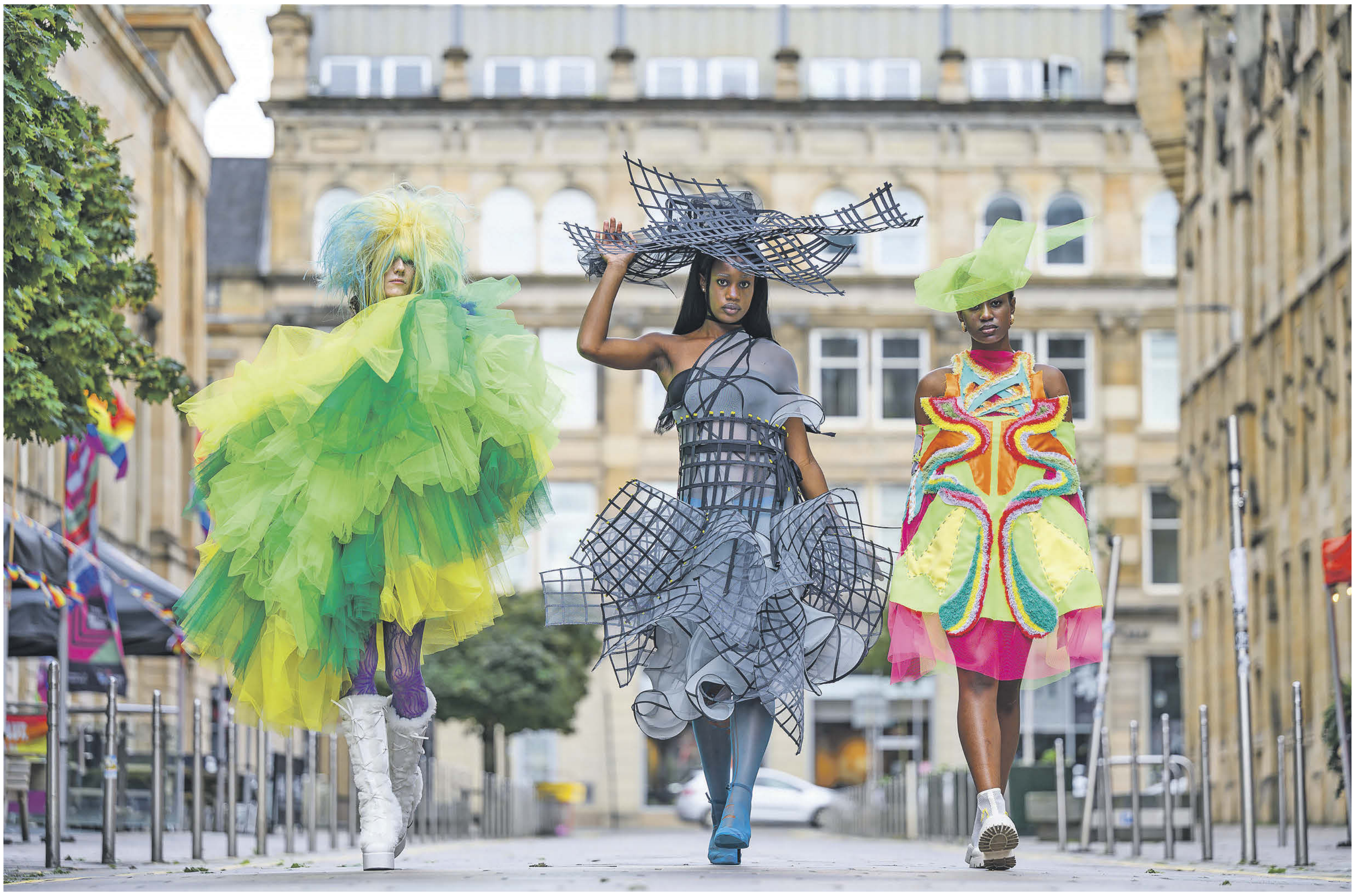


It's showtime Fashion student designs from Glasgow School of Art's master of design in fashion and textiles, with garments created by, from left to right, Kangyuedi Chen, Ke Yang and Yiling Zhou. The designs will be exhibited as part of the school's postgraduate degree show, which runs from 28 August to 3 September.

PHOTOGRAPH: WATTIE CHEUNG

Travelodge boss resigns after security failings at hotel chain

Kalyeena Makortoff

The boss of Travelodge has resigned after criticism over security failings at the hotel chain, including a case where a domestic abuser was given a key to a woman's room before assaulting her.

In a company statement yesterday, Travelodge said Joanna Boydell had stepped down and been temporarily replaced by its finance chief while a search begins for her successor.

In March, Keir Starmer, the then prime minister, wrote to Boydell warning that she must "seriously engage with MPs" over concerns about women's safety after a spate of security breaches.

The letter was sent after a hotel guest in Berkshire was sexually assaulted by a man who had wrongly been given access to her room in 2022. He had falsely claimed he was her partner, before sexually assaulting her in her hotel bed. The victim was later offered what she described as an "insulting" £30 refund.

Earlier this month, it emerged another woman who was staying in one of Travelodge's London hotels to escape her domestic abuser had been attacked after the man was given a key to her room by reception staff.

He persuaded staff to grant him access, saying his girlfriend was having a seizure. The hotel did not check before giving him the card and pointing him to her room, where he kicked in the door, assaulted her and tried to grab her phone.

The woman, who wants to remain anonymous, said she had run "shaking, crying and begging for help". "I thought someone would protect me," she told the BBC. Staff then offered her another room in the hotel.

Travelodge has previously defended itself, saying such instances were "very rare" and customer safety was a priority.

Jo Mackie, an employment law partner at Michelmores, said there was a risk the chain would go into "freefall" if it failed to regain trust: "Travelodge has been beset by awful stories involving sexual assault and poor security at hotels," she said.

"The CEO is likely to have been under great pressure to resign for some time to try and reset the brand by hiring a new leader who will overhaul the image. That is going to be incredibly hard for the incoming CEO to do, as these stories continue to appear in the media. It's difficult to see who Travelodge could bring in who would instil trust and confidence quickly and stop the business going into freefall."

▲ *Joanna Boydell has stepped down following widespread criticism*

Yesterday, Travelodge said a leading barrister had conducted a review of its room access security policies and escalation procedures, and its own internal review was ongoing.

The company added it had also conducted an "audit" to ensure all UK rooms had a secondary deadbolt.

Travelodge said: "Any additional or replacement room key now requires explicit permission from the guest staying in the room. This builds on our existing policy to never confirm to any third party that a guest is staying at one of our hotels."

The company said 12,000 of its customer-facing staff across more than 600 of its UK sites were being trained, and a violence against women and girls expert had been brought in to train Travelodge's senior bosses.

"They have reviewed our existing policies and procedures and will assist with how we respond to the independent review and its recommendation," the hotel chain said.

"The safety and security of customers in our hotels is extremely important and we want everyone to be safe, and feel safe, in our hotels. We have acted quickly to make changes to improve safety and security."

BBC DJ Nelson reveals brain tumour surgery but says he is 'raring to go'

Nadeem Badshah

The BBC Radio 2 DJ Trevor Nelson has revealed he had surgery after being diagnosed with a brain tumour and says he is now on the mend.

In June, the broadcaster said he was taking a break from work to deal with health issues. In an Instagram post yesterday, Nelson said his "world was turned upside down" when he found out about his diagnosis.

The 62-year-old has spent the past month "recuperating, resting and recovering" after surgery that went "incredibly well", and said he hoped to return to work soon.

Nelson, who has spent a 30-year career at the BBC championing black British music, said in a video: "A lot of you may have seen the post that I put up at the start of summer, saying that I was stepping back from all my work commitments due to illness.

"There's been a lot of speculation as to what's wrong with me, I know that much."

About 13,000 people in the UK are diagnosed with a primary brain tumour every year, according to the Brain Tumour Charity.

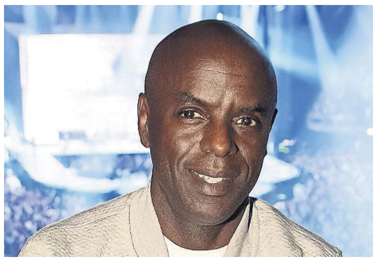
Nelson said: "I'm not going to go into it all now, and I will probably deep-dive into it at a later date so you can hear the whole crazy story.

"But I'll tell you this: I was minding my own business, and then it was discovered that I had a brain tumour. My world was turned upside down. It was a shock to myself, my close family, and friends. My head was all over the place."

He underwent surgery a few weeks after his diagnosis, and has since been receiving post-operative treatment.

Nelson said he was feeling "almost back to myself", adding: "I've had a really serious situation, but I've come out the other side at this point and I feel great. I feel raring to go, and I feel in good health."

He presented a weekday afternoon show on Radio 2, and a Sunday slot on 1Xtra, before his break.



▲ *Trevor Nelson, 62, first started presenting for the BBC in the 1990s*

▲ *The duke and duchess face the cameras during a 2019 visit to the Andalusian Gardens in Rabat, Morocco* PHOTOGRAPH: FACUNDO ARRIZABALAGA/GETTY

Sussexes' security funding on their move back to UK is private matter, says Burnham

Caroline Davies

Security arrangements for the Duke and Duchess of Sussex while living in the UK are a "private matter", said Andy Burnham, following news Harry and Meghan intend to relocate to Britain from the US this month.

The prime minister refused to be drawn on security funding, saying: "This is a private matter. It's a matter for Harry and Meghan, and we wish them well in the moves that they're making".

The couple, who went to North America more than six years ago, will live in a non-royal residence outside London, while their children, Prince Archie, seven, and Princess Lilibet, five, are already enrolled at British schools and due to start in September.

King Charles, who was told of the decision on Sunday, is said to welcome the opportunity to see more of his family in a personal capacity. There will be no change in their status as private individuals and non-working royals who do not carry out royal engagements. There is said to be no half-in, half-out option.

Security funding has been a long-running source of tension between Harry and the Home Office. The Times has reported there are no plans to provide the couple and their family with taxpayer-funded armed protection when they relocate.

Last year, the duke lost a protracted legal battle over what security he and his family would be entitled to while visiting the UK after automatic taxpayer-funded security was withdrawn when the couple stood down as working royals.

During the long-running legal challenge against the Home Office, Harry said in his witness statement: "The UK is my home. The UK is central to the heritage of my children and a place I want them to feel at home as much as where they live at the moment in the US. That cannot happen if it's not possible to keep them safe when they are on UK soil.

"I cannot put my wife in danger like that and, given my experiences in life, I am reluctant to unnecessarily put myself in harm's way too."

A senior judge later ruled that his "sense of grievance" over the decision about his security was not sufficient as grounds for an appeal.

The duke later told the BBC that he "can't see a world" in which he would bring his family to the UK.

He was understood to be awaiting a fresh risk-management assessment, but his new circumstances will have to be factored in. Decisions on the security of royals are taken by the Royal and VIP Executive Committee, an independent body overseen by the Home Office. It is not a decision for the prime minister.

After the couple left the UK, Harry was granted a "bespoke" security arrangement. He may no longer qualify for the level of protection he previously enjoyed as a working royal but he is a high-profile figure and former military serviceman who has served in Afghanistan, which might be considered in any assessment.

A Home Office spokesperson said:

> *'This is a private matter. It's a matter for Harry and Meghan and we wish them well'*
>
> **Andy Burnham**
> *Prime minister*

◀ *The Sussexes with Prince William and Catherine two days after Queen Elizabeth's death. Below left, Harry with his mother, Diana. Below, the king and queen only found out about Harry's move on Sunday*

PHOTOGRAPHS: KIRSTY O'CONNOR/GETTY; TOBY MELVILLE/REUTERS AND MARTIN KEENE/PA

▼ *Harry and Meghan will live in a non-royal residence and their children are enrolled in a school*
PHOTOGRAPH: SAMIR HUSSEIN/WIREIMAGE

"The UK government's protective security system is rigorous and proportionate. It is our long-standing policy not to provide detailed information on those arrangements, as doing so could compromise their integrity and affect individuals' security."

In the US, the Sussexes funded a private security team to protect them.

There has been no statement from them about why they are returning. But a source close to them said they had a great time during their UK visit in July, and that "stars are aligning with work" to make this a good time to move. This may include Harry's Invictus Games, which are to be held in Birmingham next year.

The couple intend to retain their properties in Montecito, California, and in Portugal. Meghan is expected to run her lifestyle brand As Ever from the UK, but it is not yet known whether she will begin undertaking charity visits as a non-working royal or embark on other ventures.

Harry has recently made it clear he wants to spend more time with his father, who is living with cancer. Next year also marks the 30th anniversary of the death of his mother, Diana. Harry and his family stayed at the Spencer family home at Althorp during a visit to the UK last month.

A YouGov poll of 5,810 adults, carried out the day after the Sussexes' surprise U-turn was revealed, showed 33% believe Harry and Meghan should not move back to the UK, while 45% do not know. Less than a quarter (21%) are in favour of it.

Analysis
Caroline Davies

Harry and Meghan have again blindsided the royals. Is that the best start for a reverse Megxit?

Just as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's departure from the UK six years ago came as a complete surprise, so too is their shock announcement that they now intend to return.

Their unilateral decision could fairly be said to have blindsided the royals. The king was only informed on Sunday, and is said not to have been involved in the decision making. No mention was made when Harry, Meghan and their two children visited Charles at his private home at Highgrove last month.

Yet in less than two weeks the Sussexes will be installed in a private non-royal residence, somewhere outside London, with Prince Archie, seven, and Princess Lilibet, five, already enrolled in British schools.

The reasons for this spectacular U-turn, which was simultaneously broken by four media outlets in the UK, US and Australia on Wednesday night, have not been spelt out. So, what has changed?

The couple left the UK amid accusations over media intrusion and attacks, especially on Meghan. Their relationships with senior royals – Charles and William in particular – were severely strained. They later cited, in TV interviews and Harry's memoir, Spare, the lack of palace support for Meghan. And their dreams of half-in-half-out royal roles had been firmly dashed by the late queen.

Six years on, such problems have not gone away – if anything they seem more firmly entrenched. In addition, the couple face the expensive headache of having lost taxpayer-funded security, which was afforded to them when they were still working royals.

Relations with some sections of the British media, meanwhile, are at an even lower ebb. Having successfully taken legal action against Mirror Group Newspapers as well as the publishers of the Sun and News of the World, Harry returns having comprehensively lost his latest courtroom battle against the publishers of the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday over unproven allegations of unlawful information gathering.

There appears to be some form of reconciliation with Charles, yet there were times over the past six years when, Harry has said, his father did not return his calls. Palace officials have been cautious throughout about private information leaking, given Harry's willingness to talk so publicly.

While it is "great on a personal level" for Charles to have more private access to his younger son and grandchildren, it will "take a long time to establish a reasonable degree of trust", said Joe Little, managing editor of Majesty Magazine. "People will still wonder, do Harry and Meghan have another media deal set up.

"It was six years plus in the fracturing. It's not going to be a case of six weeks and everything is forgiven and forgotten."

The relationship with William presents an even more significant challenge, with the brothers estranged. The former BBC royal correspondent Peter Hunt suggests William, the future king, would be "apoplectic" at the Sussex's return.

Little said: "If there is a rival court there is very little that anybody can do about it … For mischief-making media it's a great headline story, this fractious relationship between William and his brother, and is it going to repair."

Given no details, it is assumed that issues over security – which had stuck so much in Harry's craw he said his wife and children could not visit the UK without Home Office-funded protection – is no longer the issue it was for the couple, who have funded their own protection while in the US. The royals famously never comment on security, and the prime minister, Andy Burnham, would only say it was a "private matter" for the couple, and would not be drawn on any details.

The fact no mention of their return was mentioned to the king last month could indicate this was a speedy decision made by the couple, and perhaps down to where they wanted their children educated.

Undoubtedly Harry has missed the UK. In the US, while involved with the deals the couple struck with Netflix and Spotify, these had seemed more Meghan-orientated projects. Harry was prominent when it came to his UK charities, and in particular his beloved Invictus Games, which is delighted at news of his return.

Perhaps, as another former BBC royal correspondent, Jennie Bond, speculated, this time Meghan is "taking one for the team".

The couple will retain their homes in California and Portugal. Meghan will continue to run her lifestyle brand As Ever from their new base. But in embarking on their new life, there will be undoubted teething problems. And as Little points out: "There are far more questions than answers."

▲ *Locksmiths say there has been a 'significant increase' in heat-related callouts this summer*
PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

Demand for locksmiths surges as hot weather means doors get stuck

Esther Addley

Thursday was another busy day for Alan Hickman, a Bournemouth-based locksmith who works in the New Forest ("though I'm currently dodging the bit between Ringwood and Eastleigh, because that's closed because of the forest fires").

Speaking on his way to see a man who can't close his patio doors – "probably because they've got some expansion issues" – he then has a callout to see an elderly woman who needs a lockbox for her carer, before visiting another customer in Westbourne "to sort another composite door that can't lock".

Such cases of sticking, unopening or unlockable doors are much more common at present, says Hickman – all due, like so much else, to the very hot weather across much of the UK over the past few months.

"We're getting what feels like double the amount of calls a day because customers' doors just aren't able to open, or they can't close them at the end of a hot day until they've cooled down again," he says.

Though Hickman has worked with LockRite, one of the UK's largest networks of uniformed locksmiths, for 14 years, this summer has "definitely brought a significant increase" in heat-related callouts.

It's a pattern repeated across the country, most noticeably in areas where temperatures have been highest, according to Steffan George, managing director of the Master Locksmiths Association (MLA), a not-for-profit trade body for the industry.

A recent Facebook post on the subject, entitled "Why is my uPVC door difficult to lock?", got tens of thousands of views, about 50 times the usual traffic for its posts, presumably as a result of people Googling exactly that question.

"So this is something locksmiths are very au fait with, yes," he says.

Doors may be made of different materials, but each of them can be affected by extreme temperatures, thanks to the simple physics most people learned in school. Heat, for example, causes many substances to expand, including the form of plastic that makes up uPVC and parts of composite doors.

"What happens is the door tends to bind with the frame because it's expanding out, so it's making it awkward to open," George says. "It particularly happens if the door is south-facing, and also if it's a dark colour, which attracts the heat even more."

Wooden doors can also be significantly affected by high temperatures, if for the opposite reason – tending to shrink, rather than swell, in the heat. "A traditional timber door will start to shrink because all the moisture has been drawn out, particularly if the door's not been well maintained and painted," says Shane Hales, an MLA-affiliated locksmith based in Sidcup, Kent. That can cause doors to drop and move, putting strain on locks which can become stiffer or impossible to operate, he says.

Hales would normally do four or five heat-related door adjustments a week – currently that figure is about 10, he says. "It's been a very busy summer with this sort of stuff."

Whatever the cause, a locksmith can usually sort out a sticking door fairly straightforwardly by realigning the door, or moving the hinges if necessary, Hales says.

Unsurprisingly, he advises getting professional help sooner rather than later. "If you're leaning on the door or pulling through the letterbox to turn the mortice lock, there's something not right. It's not aligned. And all that happens is people put force on the key, the key snaps something inside the lock and then the bill starts to escalate."

When temperatures eventually start to drop going into autumn and winter, a new set of problems will arise, he says – plastic gets harder and more brittle, while poorly sealed timber starts to swell. "This is why you've got to make sure that all your locks are in alignment.

"We go out to customers and say, 'When was the last time the door was serviced?' And they'll say, 'No one's looked at it in 20 years. We just force the door shut or force the locks.' So that's a big part of it – people not taking care of their doors."

Men with heart disease more likely to develop cancer – study

Andrew Gregory
Health editor

Millions of men with heart disease have a higher risk of developing and dying from cancer, according to a decades-long study.

The biggest drivers of male cases are smoking, obesity and drinking too much alcohol, researchers say, with the link most pronounced in lung and oesophageal cancers.

Analysing health data from 22,000 Britons over 25 years, researchers at the University of Aberdeen and Keele University discovered stark gender differences in outcomes of people living with heart disease.

About half the participants – 11,000 – had cardiovascular disease (CVD) at the start of the study, or developed it over the next three decades.

The lifetime risk of cancer among those with CVD was higher in men (17.3%) than in women (12.8%), the study found. In those without CVD, the cancer risk was 10.2% among men and 8.2% for women.

Dr Tiberiu Pana, a specialty registrar in cardiology at NHS Grampian and honorary early career clinical research fellow at the University of Aberdeen, said: "We found that cancer incidence and death were higher in people with cardiovascular disease than in those without – a relationship we already knew a bit about.

"However, through looking at this large patient group over a very long period of time we were able to examine it more thoroughly. We have identified clear differences between men and women across a range of factors in those with cardiovascular disease and all types of cancer."

Further analysis of cancers excluding the reproductive system suggested that people with heart disease faced higher rates of gastric, oesophageal, lung, bowel and non-melanoma skin cancers.

These were also more prominent among men, according to the study. The results were published in the European Heart Journal.

Men with CVD also had an increased risk of dying from gastric, oesophageal and lung cancers . This may be driven by common risk factors between CVD and cancer, the researchers said.

17.3%
Lifetime risk of cancer among men with cardiovascular disease, compared with 12.8% for women

Mamas Mamas, a professor of cardiology at Keele University, said more research was needed to better understand the reasons behind the increased cancer risk in people with heart disease. "Furthermore, whilst cardio-oncology services have focused mainly on cancer patients preventing the development of cardiovascular diseases, we need better pathways that can identify and prevent cancer development in patients with cardiac conditions."

Nicola Smith, of the charity Cancer Research UK, said: "Many causes of cancer and heart disease overlap, which may explain why there's a link between the two, and both of these diseases are more common in people from deprived areas."

Cancer is slightly more likely to affect men, partly because smoking rates are higher, Smith says, but more research is needed to confirm the stronger link between heart disease and cancer in men than in women.

"If anyone is concerned about their risk of cancer or heart disease, there are proven steps they can take to reduce it. These include not smoking, keeping a healthy weight, and cutting down on alcohol."

Lewes rail line to reopen in weeks as work continues to remove train

Alex Daniel

The Sussex railway line on which a train derailed will reopen in September as crews continue to remove the carriages that left the track.

Rail bosses said they were prioritising reopening the route before the end of the school holidays, despite recovery workers operating under "very challenging circumstances".

Three carriages at the back of the train operated by Southern derailed just before 4pm on 13 August, injuring 30 people and trapping passengers on board.

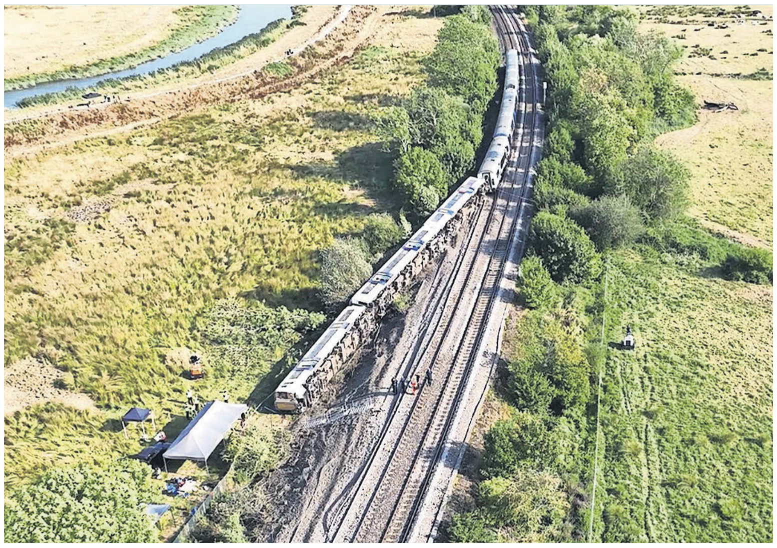
An initial report by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) on Wednesday found a track defect on the approach to where the train derailed, which happened on the hottest day of the year so far.

Twenty people were taken to hospital and two suffered serious injuries.

The stretch of railway between Lewes and Haywards Heath is scheduled to remain closed until 1 September. That will provide time for the train to be recovered – a complex job involving the derailed carriages being lifted by crane – and for recovery teams to ensure evidence is preserved.

Lucy McAuliffe, the Sussex route director for Network Rail, said: "The location of the derailment, which happened in close proximity to the River Ouse, means that reinstatement of the site is particularly complex, with teams working round the clock to reopen the line for customers as soon and as safely as possible."

▲ *The first carriage of the train being hoisted from the scene of the derailment yesterday; below, an aerial image of the aftermath of the incident shows the extent of the complex work facing recovery crews* PHOTOGRAPHS: NETWORK RAIL/PA



Images showed a crane holding up one of the carriages yesterday afternoon as staff removed luggage and bicycles.

John Whitehurst, the chief executive of Greater Thameslink Railway, which owns Southern, said: "Getting the line open in time for the end of the school holidays is an absolute priority for us and we are working closely with Network Rail to achieve this despite very challenging circumstances."

The RAIB's initial report included an image that appeared to show that the track had buckled – something that can happen in high temperatures – before the train derailed.

Key contributor to Channel 4 show on ADHD withdraws her support

Amelia Hill

A key contributor to a controversial Channel 4 documentary on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder has withdrawn her support for the programme, saying it was biased and could lead to an increased suicide risk by encouraging parents to take their children off medication.

Katya Rubia, a professor of cognitive neuroscience at the institute of psychiatry, psychology and neuroscience at King's College London, also said The Great ADHD Myth? misrepresented her views.

"I agreed to take part in this documentary because I knew it was aiming to show ADHD was a myth and I wanted to provide an alternative view," she said. "But they cherrypicked, largely misrepresented, truncated and presented my comments out of context to make them fit into their narrative.

"Biased programmes like this one that push their view of ADHD as a mythical entity are irresponsible and will have detrimental effects … at a time when mental health conditions are escalating and where there is an urgent need for early diagnosis and early treatment," she added.

Rubia said ADHD was largely undermedicated in the UK. She said parents of children with ADHD might take their children off medication, as seen on the programme, potentially leading to adverse outcomes such as depression and poorer academic achievement.

The Channel 4 programme was presented by the NHS psychiatrist Dr Max Pemberton, who concluded that ADHD was a "social construct" and that schools should better support a wider range of children rather than medicating them to fit into a norm.

Rubia criticised the documentary for filming the experience of Mason, a 10-year-old boy, while he was taken off ADHD medication.

"This 'experiment' provided nothing but anecdotal evidence confounded by a host of factors," she said. "The child was not only taken off medication, but also off screens, off additives and junk food, subjected to more nature experience and by implication to more interaction with family, friends and parents … There was also the uncontrolled placebo effect of being treated on TV."

A Channel 4 spokesperson said: "We are satisfied that Katya Rubia's contribution has been edited fairly, is an accurate representation of the interview she gave and that her consent was informed."

They said the film would open discussion on whether the world was equipped to accommodate ADHD behaviours and the ethics of medication, particularly in children when the long-term effects were unknown.

Snake 'back to her feisty self' after trailblazing cancer treatment on jaw

Jodie is so big she needed two operating tables to be pushed together

PHOTOGRAPH: CHESTER ZOO/PA

Hannah Al-Othman
North of England correspondent

A 4.5-metre (15ft) python is believed to be the first snake in the world to be given a pioneering, life-saving cancer treatment normally used on humans.

The 50kg reticulated python, named Jodie Foster after the Hollywood star, has just turned 23 and lives at Chester zoo. Keepers first became concerned about her health when she began eating less and spending more time inactive. She was diagnosed with a fibrosarcoma - a malignant tumour - in her jaw, which was removed with surgery but later returned and began to invade her jawbone.

With her life at risk, she underwent electrochemotherapy. Now, months after the procedure, she is said to be eating normally and "back to her usual bright and feisty self".

Pythons can unhinge their jaws to swallow prey many times the size of their head, and in the months since her surgery zoo staff have observed that Jodie continues to strike, grip and swallow food without difficulty.

Ian Ashpole, a veterinary officer at the zoo, said: "When the tumour came back and started destroying part of her jawbone, we knew more surgery on its own probably wasn't going to be enough.

> *'We were facing the possibility of losing her as the tumour made it difficult for her to eat'*
>
> **Ian Ashpole**
> *Zoo veterinary officer*

"We were facing the possibility of losing her as the tumour made it more and more difficult for her to eat, so we worked with cancer specialists to see whether we could adapt electrochemotherapy for a snake. As far as we're aware, this is the first time it's ever been used in one."

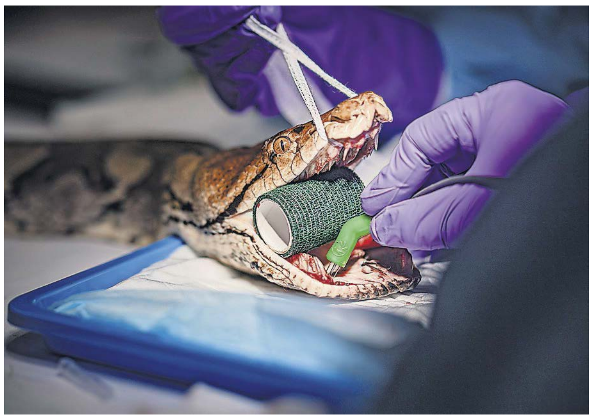
Jodie, whose name derives from staff noticing her paperwork was marked "JF" - shorthand for "juvenile female" - is so big that no single operating table would have been able to accommodate her. Two were pushed together, making a platform the size of a double bed.

She was anaesthetised in her own habitat and carefully carried to the zoo's veterinary centre, where she underwent the 90-minute procedure.

Ashpole first removed the tumorous mass as well as part of Jodie's diseased jawbone, before electrochemotherapy was administered to target any remaining cancerous cells.

Electrochemotherapy combines the cancer drug bleomycin with a series of electrical pulses delivered directly to the tumour site. The pulses temporarily make cancer cells more permeable, allowing the drug to enter more effectively.

Jose Alvarez Picornell, of the University of Liverpool's department of small animal clinical science, said: "Electrochemotherapy is an emerging treatment and this was the first time it had been used in a snake. The success of this treatment is a testament to the power of collaboration. By working closely with Ian, we were able to develop a plan that not only benefited Jodie Foster but will also contribute to the wider veterinary community."



Surgeons hold Jodie's jaw open during the 23-year-old's operation to remove part of her jawbone and target any cancer cells

PHOTOGRAPH: CHESTER ZOO/PA

A final check this week confirmed that Jodie remained free of any signs of the cancer returning.

Picornell added: "We will be formally publishing details of the procedure so that veterinary colleagues around the world can learn from and build upon our approach. This has been a very special career highlight for me and a fantastic opportunity to expand the work we do within the department to support high-quality veterinary and translational research."

Cinemas consider banning Meta glasses over piracy fears

Kalyeena Makortoff

Cinemas in the UK are considering banning customers from wearing Meta's smartglasses, amid fears they could be used to pirate films.

The UK Cinema Association (UKCA) trade body said a number of local chains could end up introducing policies that restrict camera-enabled smartglasses at the big screen, adding to a growing list of venues concerned about covert use.

The £359 specs, which have been dubbed "pervert glasses" and "spyware" by critics, are prompting growing concerns, leading to bans at restaurants, theatres, pubs and courtrooms.

The UKCA said it was not aware of any bans by members to date, but that bosses would have to balance their concerns with the potential benefits provided by the AI-enabled technology to customers with accessibility issues. The glasses can help viewers with bespoke subtitles, for example, providing support for people with visual impairment or hearing loss.

In a statement first reported by Sky News, the trade body said: "Cinema operators are aware of the increasing availability and use of wearable technology such as smartglasses and the extent to which these can provide benefits to those with specific access requirements. However, they are also mindful of the issues around privacy and film piracy that arise around the use of such technology in cinemas, and as a result many are introducing policies to prohibit and/or restrict the wearing of camera-enabled smartglasses in particular in their venues.

"This is clearly a developing area, and we will continue to work with our members to ensure their approach remains relevant and proportionate."

Meta says a tiny, flashing LED light activates on the glasses when they are being used to film, and that frequently updated tamper-detection technology is deployed to stop users covering this light during recordings.

However, there have been instances of people complaining that they have been videoed without prior knowledge. Such reports will add to piracy concerns for cinemas.

Other large chains in the UK's leisure and entertainment sector have already taken a hardline stance.

ATG Entertainment, which owns the Bristol Hippodrome, Edinburgh Playhouse and various theatres across London, has stressed that filming is not allowed and that people will be asked to remove the glasses before shows.

Meanwhile, the chief executive of the pub chain Wetherspoons, Tim Martin, said: "The general code that applies in our pubs, and most pubs, is that you can't film customers or employees without their permission.

"Meta glasses [pictured below] seem to breach this code, and common sense, by enabling surreptitious surveillance, so our instinct is to say turn off the cameras. This is akin to our efforts to stop audible playing of videos in our pubs, which also invades people's space."

Meta's glasses can be used to film

A Meta spokesperson said: "People use our glasses because they're helpful and let them stay in the moment, from listening to music to live translation or hands-free calls. They also provide critical new technology for people in the blind and low-vision community, and limiting how people can use this technology would be a major step backwards.

"Naturally some places shouldn't be filmed at all and that's reasonable, but rules should be applied consistently. Our glasses have a light that turns on to let people know when a photo or video is taken, something smartphones and other cameras don't have."

Phillipson says racism and sexism have become 'normalised' in UK

Continued *from page 1*

of alienating their own voters. Phillipson's comments suggest that under Andy Burnham ministers will be freer to take on their opponents more directly, even on sensitive issues such as race and gender equality.

Her comments about online misogyny underline the government's determination to push through the under-16 social media ban, which was one of Keir Starmer's last announcements in office and which ministers have promised will be in place by next spring.

The women and equalities minister also criticised the police for not taking violence against women and girls seriously enough. "We've seen some pretty shocking failings in terms of the police response over decades and sadly we're not seeing the progress that we should in terms of how the police will often respond to this," she said.

Labour itself is facing accusations of not taking violence against women seriously with its plan to release 5,000 prisoners early to free up space in crowded prisons.

Some in the party also think the government is veering into xenophobia with its proposals to toughen the immigration system and even deport children forcibly if their families refuse to move.

Phillipson defended the policies of the home secretary, Shabana Mahmood, saying they were necessary to restore faith in the migration system. "Having public consent for migration and having a system that is fair is absolutely essential," she said. "If you don't have that, then everything falls away."

Phillipson's criticisms of other parties in part reflect her second role as party chair, which involves coordinating attack lines against Labour's opposition.

But it is also a sign of the personal animosity between her and senior Tory politicians, including the opposition leader, Kemi Badenoch.

Badenoch has accused Phillipson, who raised taxes on private school fees as education secretary, of being a "spiteful class warrior". The comments caused a row in the Commons as the two MPs traded remarks.

Phillipson spoke in depth about that incident for the first time since it happened, saying: "When she had her say, I just kind of said that people would find her out for who she really was." She added: "I'm from an ordinary working-class family in the north-east. They [the opposition] don't like people like me making the argument for what I believe. For some of them, I guess they think I should just get back in my box."

Having been moved by Burnham, Phillipson said she was sad to leave her education brief, but said the new prime minister had lifted the mood within the party. "There is a real sense of energy and hope and purpose," she said. "My reflection on where we began in July 2024 is that a bit more of that would have probably got us a long way down the line."

She added that Burnham had brought "a sense of hopefulness and optimism that I think people have felt has been lacking, not just actually since we came into government, but for years before that".

She denied the party was planning to use the polling bounce it has seen since Burnham entered Downing Street to launch an early election. "We were elected with a five-year mandate in 2024, and I see no reason that we would depart from that," she said.

▼ *Bridget Phillipson accused the police of not taking violence against women and girls seriously enough*
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LEVENE/THE GUARDIAN

BRITAIN NEED
APPRENTIC

Sketch

John Crace

Farage remains in hiding while Tice and Braverman continue Reform's summer of fun

You have to hand it to them. Most political parties would have chosen to go quiet, what with it being the middle of August and having next to nothing to say. But Reform are made of stronger stuff. They aren't bothered that the only interesting thing about them at the moment is that they are fighting like rats in a sack. They seem to wear that as a badge of honour. So for the second time in a week they called a press conference.

Obviously there was no sign of Nigel Farage. He is still in hiding, avoiding answering questions on Reform's unusual funding models and perhaps having therapy to recover from his humiliating byelection adventure. Nor were we to be graced with Zia Yusuf, who is now close to becoming persona non grata in the party, having picked fights with almost everyone.

So that left this presser in the shaky hands of Richard Tice and Suella Braverman. It was Dicky who got us under way, trying not to look too grumpy that the weather had turned and rain was forecast. He seems to prefer the smell of smoke, the thrill of firefighters risking their lives to put out wildfires and the threat of drought. Dicky didn't mince his words. He wasn't going to congratulate those students who had got their A-level results last week or their GCSE results yesterday.

Why? Because almost certainly 80% of them had either underperformed or wasted their time on taking "Mickey Mouse" subjects. Why bother with modern languages? It's foreigners who should be learning English. And they could forget history. Just a load of crap about stuff that had happened a long time ago.

Dicky was here to extol the benefits of being an apprentice. He had been an apprentice once, he said. He could clearly remember his first day on a construction site digging trenches with a JCB. It had been the making of him. Why, it was only a matter of a few years before he was CEO of his own property company. He omitted to mention that the business he was running was the family firm started by his grandfather. But don't think for a minute that Dicky was just another nepo baby. He had got where he had in life on merit. It takes skill to turn a large fortune into a small one.

Here was the thing. Children were being held back by their schools. By their own limited imaginations. These days kids should learn to choose their own parents a bit better. That's a life-skill children should be taught in

▼ *Reform UK's Suella Braverman and Richard Tice extol the benefits of apprenticeships yesterday*

PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA

school. And start to think outside the box. There must be hundreds of apprenticeships in dodgy crypto deals, money laundering and offshore accounts.

Braverman had tried and failed not to look too patronising while Dicky had been wittering on. You get the feeling she still feels apprenticeships are something for other people's kids rather than her own. But she was starting at a huge disadvantage when explaining the new Reform offering. It obviously didn't help the government had already spelled out its own, rather more thought through apprenticeship scheme, so the morning was something of a waste of everyone's time.

But what really stuck in the throat was that Braverman spent the first five or so minutes saying that the government had let down students over the past 15 years. Now either she is suffering from extreme memory loss or she imagines the rest of us are. Because until January this year she had been a Tory MP and a senior cabinet minister in successive Conservative governments.

Then Braverman got to the nitty gritty. Businesses were to be helped to take on apprenticeships. Much like they were under Labour. And she was going to cancel any degrees that weren't strictly vocational and close down almost every university because they were a waste of time. Mere generators of student debt.

We moved on to Reform's latest contributions to the light entertainment industry. The squabbles. The fuck-ups. Dicky's eyes lit up. Things were going great. Had never been better. The infighting was just day-to-day disagreements. And Farage had had a huge triumph in Clacton. No one had ever beaten a man with a bin on his head so comprehensively. It had been such a success that Reform was looking forward to going through the whole process again if a recall petition is triggered following a parliamentary standards investigation. The summer of fun just gets better.

> *Tice was trying not to look grumpy that the weather had turned and rain was forecast. He seems to prefer the smell of smoke*

Health New Reform aide backed NHS privatisation

Kiran Stacey
Policy editor

Reform UK's new economic adviser has previously called the pensions triple lock unsustainable, advocated privatising the NHS and welcomed migration as a poverty alleviation tool, the Guardian can reveal.

Robert Jenrick, Reform's economic spokesperson, has appointed Mitchell Palmer, a rightwing economist at the free-market Adam Smith Institute, as one of his key aides.

Palmer's background is as a champion of economic liberalism, in many cases putting him to the right of Reform's existing policy platform.

His appointment comes amid tensions within the party between those who want to lean into its tax-cutting agenda and those who worry that steep cuts to welfare and other spending will alienate voters.

Palmer has previously called for the abolition of the triple lock, arguing it is an expensive and unsustainable way to protect pensioners.

He told GB News in April that he disagreed with Jenrick's decision to back the triple lock, which guarantees that the state pension will rise by the highest of earnings, inflation and 2.5% every year. Nigel Farage, the Reform leader, had previously suggested the policy would be "up for debate".

Palmer told the news channel: "The triple lock is an expensive way to ensure that pensioners have dignity in their retirement. There are ways that you can do that without the unpredictable ratcheting effect that the triple lock has." He added: "Pensioners almost by definition are made better off in real terms than workers and that obviously is, 1) unsustainable as the number of pensioners that each worker has to pay for increases, but 2) can be seen by those younger generations as somewhat unfair."

In a separate media appearance, this time on a podcast hosted by the former Conservative MP Steve Baker, he argued for the privatisation of the NHS. Asked by Baker if it was time to privatise the service, he replied: "Well, it's long past time, Steve."

He added: "The reality is the NHS is a horrifically performing system. It establishes much lower cancer survival rates.

"It has obvious rationing - we all know that when we try and get a GP appointment or a specialist appointment. It has a pretty bad safety record - that's not for lack of spending."

At times his commitment to liberal economics seems to go against Reform's key policy positions.

In 2020, when working in the New Zealand parliament, he argued online for the benefits of economic migration, posting: "Hot take: Allowing people in from abroad who choose to come to NZ and earn *significantly* more than they would at home is not slavery. In fact, it is one of the best contributions we can make to global poverty alleviation."

▲ *Mitchell Palmer has been a champion of economic liberalism*

Others views include ending VAT exemptions and imposing a land tax.

A Reform spokesperson said: "Unlike the Guardian, Robert believes in hiring smart people with whom he disagrees."

A Labour source said: "Reform have long talked up selling off the NHS to the highest bidder and going after ordinary people's rights. It's no surprise they're hiring a brainchild of those types of damaging policies. Nigel Farage's party have already shown the public who they are. It's time to believe them."

Jenrick is bolstering his team at a time he is looking to stamp his authority on his party's economic agenda.

This week he announced Reform would make steep cuts to welfare if it is elected which he said would total £50bn a year by 2030. Those cuts mean even people with terminal illnesses and permanent disabilities would be likely to see their incomes slashed by up to £10,000 a year, according to a leaked government analysis seen by the Guardian.

There are signs of resistance to Jenrick's position from within Reform, however.

This week the party's home affairs spokesperson, Zia Yusuf, posted on X: "Have you noticed the people with 'Right Honourable' in their titles are among the most dishonourable people in the country?"

Jenrick has the title of "right honourable", which denotes membership of the privy council, as do several others who have defected from the Conservatives to Reform, including Suella Braverman and Nadine Dorries.

Suspension Tice supports move against Montgomerie

Rowena Mason
Whitehall editor

Reform UK's deputy leader has defended the party's suspension of a senior activist who criticised Nigel Farage, saying disagreements should be kept "behind closed doors".

Richard Tice, who is also Reform's business spokesperson, made the comments as he unveiled a new policy of subsidising more apprenticeships, paid for by cutting student loans to foreign nationals and those studying what he termed "Mickey Mouse" degrees.

Reform UK has been stalling in the polls in recent months after questions about Farage's financial affairs, with a personal £5m gift from the Thailand-based billionaire Christopher Harborne under investigation by parliament's standards watchdog.

The party has also faced splits over the actions of Zia Yusuf, its home affairs spokesperson, who called a senior Conservative a "traitor", and the suspension of Tim Montgomerie, a high-profile activist who had defected from the Tories.

Montgomerie had been critical of Farage's decision not to attend the count when he won the Clacton byelection, and said the leader had shown a "too dominant aggrieved tone", arguing: "You don't skip your own victory count without a much better explanation."

The Reform member, who had posed with Farage when he joined the party, was informed this week of his suspension.

Asked at a press conference whether the party had become thin-skinned and unable to take criticism, Tice said it was "far from" the case and Reform was climbing again in the polls: "We're not afraid of competition, voters have got more choice and none of us have ever claimed we are perfect … we get lots right, we make mistakes, we push on."

On Montgomerie's suspension, he said: "There will be a range of views and sometimes we will agree and sometimes we will have a debate and discussion … but what we've always said is that when you're having your discussions about those things, in the nicest possible way, as you would in a boardroom or a brainstorming session in a company, is that you keep it behind closed doors and then you go out and sell a message."

Tice was joined by Reform UK's education spokesperson, Suella Braverman, at the event in Enfield, north London.

They announced they would reform apprenticeships to bring in a "wage credit" offering small and medium-sized businesses a 30% rebate on the salaries of those aged 16 to 18. The party estimated the wage subsidy would cost between £1.5bn and £2bn over the course of a five-year parliament.

Braverman warned students getting their results not to "waste your time studying for a pointless degree at a mediocre university".

She said: "Whether it's gender studies, whether it's golf course studies, I think I've seen there's not a necessity. There's not a value in many of these degrees.

"Now I know that might be uncomfortable to those people who have those qualifications, but the reality is you've got to ask yourself: what are your graduate outcomes looking like?"

£2bn

The estimated five-year cost of a 'wage credit' for small businesses that employ 16- to 18-year-olds

Norwich court finds man guilty of murdering his estranged wife

Press Association

A man has been found guilty of murdering his estranged wife after their relationship broke down.

Norfolk police said Raymond Williams, 61, had gone from venue to venue in Norwich looking for 49-year-old Tania Williams, who was on a night out with friends on 17 January this year.

The couple, who had been married for 26 years, had separated in September 2025, with Raymond Williams moving out of the family home, the force said.

▲ *Tania Williams was killed months after separating from her husband*

Witnesses in Catherine Gardens in Thorpe St Andrew reported hearing screams before finding Tania Williams lying on the ground with serious injuries late on 17 January.

Police said officers were called at 11.41pm and Tania Williams was found in the street near her home. A bloodstained craft knife was found nearby. Her cause of death was given as blood loss resulting from wounds to the neck.

Raymond Williams denied murder but was found guilty at Norwich crown court after a trial.

The couple had three children together. Tania Williams had a fourth child, who was now an adult and living in the US, the force said.

The senior investigating officer, DI Sam Pontin, said: “Tania was a mother, daughter, friend and much-loved member of her community, and our thoughts remain firmly with those who continue to grieve her death.”

Raymond Williams was remanded into custody and is due to be sentenced at Norwich crown court on 25 September.

Fraudster who said he was wealthy ex-soldier is jailed

Press Association

A fraudster who claimed he was a special forces soldier turned multi-millionaire cancer patient has been jailed for three years and two months.

Joseph Gibson, 35, lied that he had served in the Special Boat Service, owned luxury yachts and cars, and was worth £400m.

He was eventually arrested and admitted to four counts of fraud, relating to three women and one man, whom he conned out of £68,000 between July 2020 and October 2021.

Gibson previously asked a judge at Bristol crown court to delay sentencing – claiming he had £40,000 in savings to repay his victims after working in the engineering industry in Britain, Bulgaria and Dubai.

Gibson admitted yesterday he had been unable to raise the sum and could only provide £15,000 until more funds became available.

He told Recorder Jaron Crooknorth that he could save £5,000 a month for compensation and asked for his sentence to be deferred for a further nine months to fully repay his victims.

However, the judge refused that request and instead jailed Gibson for three years and two months. The judge also ordered the start of proceedings to recover money gained through his fraud.

“Joseph Gibson, you are simply a fraudster,” the judge told him. “It has taken years for you to admit that.

“Pity those who have had the misfortune to have you come into their lives, prey on their affections, steal their money, steal their goals and fracture their relationships.”

The judge said Gibson had been of previous good character and admitted his offending, albeit shortly before his trial. He added that the defendant would get “very little” reduction in his sentence for remorse.

◀ *Joseph Gibson conned victims out of £68,000, claiming he had a £400m fortune and was suffering from cancer*

“You are sorry for the position you have found yourself in,” the judge said. “You have tried to persuade this court that you have more money than you have. You have not shown evidence of that money to me. You have sought to deceive this court into believing that you had it.”

The court heard that Gibson had met two of his victims on Tinder and persuaded one of them they were in a relationship. He showed pictures of large houses and claimed he was thinking of buying them.

Gibson told his victims that he had cancer, had served in the Special Boat Service and had been blown up by an improvised explosive device – claims that the judge called “total fantasy”.

In text messages released after the case, Gibson is shown claiming he had homes in Sandbanks, Bath, Dubai, Singapore and Mayfair, London, as well as 21 rental properties.

He wrote: “Mate I have everything I want I have amazing houses cars boats helicopters.”

Gibson also claimed to have made £1.1m through financial trading, adding: “I am trading a 5 million account on my phone from a hospital bed”.

In one exchange, he asked a victim about their preference for clothing and shoe brands. After being asked the spending limit, Gibson replied: “Haha can I let you into a little secret I think we know you well enough and I can trust you now but please do not repeat it it’s not in a bragging and showing off way I’m pretty humble … In January I was valued at 440m.”

His first victim, a Devon-based businesswoman, lost more than £5,200 after believing his lies and handing over money for him to buy stock for her retail business.

In August 2020, Gibson told the woman – whom he had met on Tinder – that he had cancer and even sent her a photograph of himself purportedly in a hospital bed.

By the end of his fraud, the woman had just 93p left in her bank account.

Gibson, of Ruthin, Denbighshire, appeared to be shaking throughout the court hearing.

He will next appear for a hearing under the Proceeds of Crime Act, to recover his assets to repay his victims, in March.

Speaking after the case, the lead investigator, Jenny Williams of Avon and Somerset police, said: “Joseph Gibson is a confident and manipulative man who developed an extensive web of lies for his own personal gain. … His deception has left his victims struggling to come to terms with the extent of his dishonesty.”

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◀ *From left: Angela (Lauren Patel), Tony (Omar Malik), Laurence (Kevin Bishop), Bev (Outhwaite) and Sue (Pandora Colin)*

Theatre review

An enjoyable social satire of 1970s with a modern tweak

◀ *Tamzin Outhwaite plays Beverly in Nadia Fall's production*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANTHONY HARVEY/ SHUTTERSTOCK

Tamzin Outhwaite banishes Alison Steadman's original portrayal of Bev as the definitive one

Abigail's Party
Harold Pinter theatre, London
★★★☆☆

Arifa Akbar

Alison Steadman has cast a long shadow over the suburban gargoyle-cum-bored-housewife in Mike Leigh's social satire about 1970s social mobility. Her name is almost always invoked in relation to Beverly. Tamzin Outhwaite's incredible achievement is that she banishes Steadman's original portrayal of Bev as the definitive one.

Having first assumed the role in Nadia Fall's 2024 production, that history shows in her polish and command of the character. The setting is a drinks party in Essex and Outhwaite's Bev (glittering dress, Farrah Fawcett flicks) is full of lady-of-the-manor pretensions as she serves up her officious rounds of drink. But there is a hard, calculating edge to her marital digs at estate agent husband, Laurence (Kevin Bishop) and her crude flirtation with guest Tony (Omar Malik, fantastically laconic), which she conducts with flamboyant disregard for his wife, Angela (Lauren Patel).

This seeps out early on, even before she has started to knock back the gin. She is simultaneously funny in her physical comedy and deadly serious in her put-downs of the workaholic husband who is not giving her the attention she craves, as well as her manipulations of others. Beneath her patter as party hostess is rage, hurt and an almost Madame Bovary boredom.

Her performance, and Fall's production as a whole, proves that this period comedy of manners is eternally resonant. That is partly down to the genius of the play but Fall adds an ingenious tweak in the suggestion that Tony and Ange are of "Pakistani" origin. This transforms its meanings in a subtle but deft way: the area, we hear, is being taken over by different kinds of people and you imagine this not only being a comment on working-class mobility but racial diversity here in the "white flight" heartland of Essex.

What does not work as well is the chemistry between Bev and Laurence, which lacks bite in the first act. Laurence is rather passive and expressionless, the tension between them uncharged. The marital conflict does not seem ferocious enough for too long, so you do not feel the truth of the friction between them when it bursts to the surface. They could just be George and Mildred on a bad night. In contrast, the fault lines in Ange and Tony's marriage are savagely revealed in his disdain of her, as much as she tries to cover it up with fake cheeriness.

It is still hugely enjoyable to see Bev flirt with Tony, and to hear Ange's inappropriate reflections on divorce in front of recently divorced neighbour, Sue (Pandora Colin). She is the other guest at this party and the mother of eponymous punk-teen, Abigail, whose off-stage party can be heard in the background.

For those who charge Leigh with othering the aspirational working classes, not only through Bev but Laurence's cultural snobberies, acquired in his ascension up the ladder (the framed Vincent van Gogh poster on Peter McKintosh's orange-and-brown period set says it all), the middle-class Sue is the key to Leigh's satire. She is brilliantly portrayed as the socially-awkward, plummy ex-wife of an architect who tries to evade Laurence's questions on the area and the class antagonisms underlying them.

He insists they listen to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony amid the rising hysteria and the record player is truly weaponised, Demis Roussos used to needle Laurence to the point of near violence.

Bev is a such a glorious creation that you feel her disappointments in marriage even as you gasp at her comic monstrousness. But the darkness of the ending does not land. It is partly because there are unanswered questions around their marriage but also because it has all been so enjoyably comical that this switch to tragedy leaves Bev speechless and at sea, for once.

Until 19 September

Stage review Motherland actor's bumbling has a vital purpose

Little Animals
Lyceum Studio, Edinburgh
★★★★☆

Mark Fisher

Nobody does self-effacement as well as Paul Ready.

The Motherland/Ann Droid actor excels at playing the kind of man who apologises for his own existence, well-meaning, but insecure – often comically so. He hesitates, smiles sheepishly, backtracks and gabbles to fill the silence. He, he, he is forever launching, launching into sentences, sentences that never get all the way to the … We get the gist.

It is the same now he is making his playwriting debut with Little Animals and it works to his advantage.

Performing in the round to a small audience, he gives every impression of having interrupted us in the middle of something else. We are not here, he ascertains, to remember his good friend Richard, in fact, we did not even know him, but sorry, if it is all right, he will tell us about him anyway.

Richard, it transpires, is the good guy in the story. He is the schoolboy disruptor with the courage to resist social pressure, the one who scoffed at their entitled classmate for the arrogance of writing an essay called How I Would Change the World.

"We need to completely rewrite the story," says Richard, committing his life to environmental activism in an era of global heating.

If Richard is the good guy, what does that make our unnamed narrator? Surely this endearing man in suit and tie, circling the room, catching us in the eye, bonding with each nervous laugh, is too reasonable to be on the wrong side. Like any of us, he recycles his waste and boycotts the correct things.

He works hard, loves his family and believes in introducing daughter Ellie to the cultures of the world.

▲ *Paul Ready's intimate Edinburgh show is performed in natural light*

And because he is so reasonable, it makes Richard seem hysterical. His protests are surely the actions of an overgrown schoolboy, a man who knows nothing of responsibility, who is simply not realistic.

Could he not have made the same modest compromises as the rest of us? Richard makes him defensive and indignant.

Directed by Caroline Steinbeis for Pentabus and Fern Culture, a company encouraging better storytelling about the climate, Ready performs in natural light with neither props nor set.

In a captivating performance, his message is familiar, but his call to action no less urgent.

Until 30 August

Wildfires to rise by at least 39% in Europe by 2100 without action

Ajit Niranjan

Wildfires are projected to burn 39% more of Europe by the end of the century even in the best-case scenario for stopping the planet from heating unless action is taken to manage them better, a study has found.

The increase in hot, dry and windy weather that leads to small fires turning into raging infernos is to engulf more of Europe as carbon pollution pushes temperatures higher. In the worst-case scenario the researchers modelled, in which global heating would reach 3.6C above pre-industrial levels, the burnt area would almost triple.

Improvements in fire management could moderate those increases by more than 70%, the study found, but not eradicate them entirely.

"Investments into fire management could help to a certain limit, but if we go on a path of high emissions … we still see strong increases in burnt area," said Maik Billing, an ecosystem researcher at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) and lead author of the study. "Fire management cannot replace climate mitigation."

The research comes as wildfires continue to ravage Europe, with large blazes hitting northern European countries such as the UK, Belgium and Germany after weeks in which France, Spain, Italy, Croatia and Greece battled monster infernos.

Across the EU, this fire season is on course to become the third-worst on record, behind 2025 and 2022, according to data published by the European Forest Fire Information Service yesterday.

More than 600,000 hectares have burned so far, with records broken for this time of year in Belgium, France and Slovakia.

▲ *Belgian firefighters were among many called out in Europe this week*

The researchers, who compared the projected annual burnt area in Europe in 2070-2100 with modelled results for the period from 2000 to 2030, found that the increase in fire weather was the biggest driver of change.

In the optimistic scenario, in which global heating is capped at 1.8C above pre-industrial levels, a little above the current level of 1.4C, some regions showed moderate increases in fire weather while others experienced little change.

In the pessimistic scenario, however, with 3.6C of heating by the end of the century, the researchers found consistent worsening of fire weather across "virtually all of Europe".

Scientists expect current policies to result in about 2.6C of global heating by the end of the century.

Using a second model, the researchers found that continued improvements in fighting fires could temper the effects of worsening fire weather, reducing burnt area by 92% in the cooler scenario compared with firefighting efforts remaining at today's levels.

The researchers used the Human Development Index as a proxy for firefighting ability, but acknowledged that the rise of mega-fires had made it hard to extrapolate from past experience.

Improvements in fire suppression since the 1980s have reduced the number of fires and the area burnt in southern Europe, a study found this month, but the enthusiastic suppression of fires, even small ones, has paradoxically increased the residual fuel load.

This has allowed fires to develop to extreme levels when conditions are favourable, resulting in fewer but more ferocious fires.

Such monster fires hit France and Spain in late July this year, forcing a third of a million people from their homes as blazes raged with a force firefighters were unable to extinguish.

Víctor Resco de Dios, a forestry engineer at the University of Lleida, who was not involved in the study, said the fire season was often accompanied by an "unproductive blame game" - isolating only one of the two key factors whose interaction results in wildfires - and that the study was a reminder to move beyond scapegoating.

"The problem of wildfires wouldn't be worsening if we were heading towards an ice age - instead of global warming," he said. "And it would have been largely mitigated if our landscapes were like they were a century ago, with a much smaller forest area."

'Like a dust bowl'

Growers tell of struggle to keep allotments alive

Nicola Slawson

Recent rain has brought some relief, but drought remains widespread across the country, and experts warn it will take weeks of sustained rainfall for water supplies to recover. For people growing their own fruit and vegetables, it has been a challenging and sometimes surprising season. The Guardian spoke to growers across England about how they are adapting to a hotter, drier climate.

'It's just not sustainable'

John Peel, 62, has been growing vegetables on his Oxfordshire allotment for eight years and says this has "definitely been the most difficult" season yet.

His plot suffered a "double whammy" - a late frost in May, which destroyed nearly all his apples and soft fruit, before months of heat and drought left much of the allotment scorched.

While some gardeners have reported fewer slugs and snails, other pests thrive in hot, dry conditions, such as the flea beetle.

"It's not just the drought," Peel said. "Normally the flea beetles would be going dormant now and they'd have stopped feeding.

"But they've absolutely decimated the brassicas. I have covered them with quite fine mesh and they're still getting under, through and around that."

Even crops that survived have disappointed, despite the effort he has put into watering them.

His tomatoes are smaller than usual and, rather than the customary glut of courgettes to give away, he has only grown enough to feed his own household.

"It's definitely less for more work. It's just not sustainable," he said. "It does get a little bit: what the hell am I doing this for?"

'I don't see any of this as a positive'

Nicola Scott, 50, who works in sustainable food system change, has been growing vegetables for more than 15 years and has a plot in Old Trafford, Manchester.

She says this year has been particularly hard as usually growers might have to contend with one significant hot spell, rather than this year's repeated heatwaves. "This shouldn't be happening in Manchester. It's weird," she said.

Salad leaves have bolted or become scorched, while her early potatoes struggled even with regular watering. Scott's two large water butts ran dry, although techniques to retain soil moisture such as broadforking, which loosens the soil so water penetrates more deeply, meant her outdoor beds have needed less watering.

She is now considering giving more space to chillies and aubergines and trying to grow sweet potatoes in her greenhouse.

"I do a lot of work on addressing climate change issues so I don't see any of this as a positive thing at all," she said. "For me it's about trying new things, but also really trying to think of ways to still grow the stuff I really like growing."

'It has been relentless and exhausting'

For Emma, 47, who has two allotments with her partner near

▼ *Allotments in north-west London this month. Growers say traditional crops have suffered the most*

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES VEYSEY/SHUTTERSTOCK

▲ *John Peel picking his grapes in Oxfordshire; Christian Doyle in Arundel, Sussex; and, right, Nicola Scott on her allotment in Manchester*

Bristol, watering is all done by hand from troughs on the site. The thorough weekly water that is needed to keep both plots alive takes two hours and involves about 6,000 steps carrying watering cans.

"It is my summer exercise routine," she said. Other allotment holders were similarly weary: "I think everyone's just complaining about how relentless and exhausting watering is.

"While I haven't seen many slugs or snails for the past 10 weeks or so, we've struggled with larger animals like badgers, rats, maybe foxes taking stuff. I can't help but think that this is due to the weather," she said. "They've taken all our sweetcorn, parsnips and a chunk of the carrots."

Emma says her peas, potatoes and beetroot have struggled in the heat, while many other traditional allotment crops are "not really enjoying the lack of water".

But the heat has brought some successes. Her tomatoes ripened weeks earlier than usual and her sweet potatoes are the biggest she has grown in five years. Most strikingly, she has grown watermelons. After experimenting with them last year, this year's crop has been even more successful. "I thought I got lucky last year because of the weather," she said. "It was such a wonderful thing to have our own watermelons."

'Where there aren't trees, it's just like a dust bowl'

Christian Doyle, 80, has had her allotment in Arundel, West Sussex, for just a year. People told her she would not be able to grow much because of a huge goat willow shading much of the site. However she believes it is partly thanks to the shade that her vegetables have mostly thrived.

When she took over the plot, it was waterlogged and its heavy clay soil seemed like a disadvantage. She piled the beds with compost, manure, straw, hay and wool, following no-dig principles. Now, she believes that organic matter is helping retain precious moisture.

Doyle has harvested onions, garlic, potatoes and beans, and is particularly proud of her dwarf French beans and tomatoes.

"It's all an experiment. I didn't know if anything would work," she said. "I just keep going down there thinking: 'Well, everything could be dead' and it's not."

Doyle says the plot has become a haven to her. "My allotment, even in this awful heat, has been a joy to be in because of the cool shade of the tree."

She has planted two silver birches, an alder and fruit trees to provide even more shade in future, and plans to use tall plants to shelter vegetables as summers become hotter.

"Where there aren't trees, it's just like a dust bowl," she said. "I'm thinking about the future and the shade they will bring long after I've gone."

▼ *Solar panels are proving popular in Britain but many households are put off by the high initial cost*

PHOTOGRAPH: WASHINGTON IMAGING/ALAMY

Energy Call for cheap loans to make solar affordable

Fiona Harvey
Environment editor

Solar panels could be made available to people on lower incomes cheaply if the government stepped in to cut the cost of loans, new research has found.

Solar panel installations can save households hundreds of pounds a year in energy bills, but at an initial cost of about £5,000-£10,000 they are beyond the reach of many households.

Loans are offered by some commercial companies to enable people to repay the cost over a longer period, but these come at high interest rates that can wipe out most of the energy bill savings for the first decade.

The rising cost of gas is expected to pile on further hardship this winter, with the cap on UK energy prices likely to rise by 4% from this October to the equivalent of £1,729 a year for the rest of the year, according to forecasts published this week.

The Common Wealth thinktank is urging the government to step in by providing a universal entitlement to solar panels, which would be paid for by "solar bonds". These would be retail investment products that the government could offer on a similar model to national savings investments or premium bonds - savers would receive interest payments in return for funding the scheme.

In this way, both households installing panels and those with spare cash to invest could benefit, according to Dr Donal Brown, a senior researcher in energy policy and political economy at the Environmental Change Institute, at Oxford University, and the lead author of the Common Wealth report.

Households would pay a much lower interest rate for their panels than they would on the open market - about half of the current market interest rates for panels, which are at about 9%-10%.

Such a scheme could cut household energy bills by about £250 a year, Brown estimated. The loans, which would run to 25 years, could be repaid through an addition to the standing charge and could be attached to the property, so that if sold the loan would pass to the next occupier.

Brown said people were unlikely to be put off by the loan attaching to the property. "If you move out, the loan and finance stays with the home, and without any kind of complex means testing. This is a state-backed product that everybody would be eligible for. Default rates on the standing charge are incredibly low, so it's a secure way of tying those repayments," he said.

People with extra cash could benefit by investing in "solar gilts" or bonds, an investment vehicle that the government could offer, which would pay out interest of 4%-5% and would finance the purchase and installation of panels for other people. "This is good retail politics that you could put Andy Burnham's face on," said Brown. "The government doing it would also drive down the installation cost."

Solar is booming in the UK, as high energy prices and long sunny days have prompted thousands of people to investigate the clean energy option. The government is also making it easier for households without the cash for a conventional rooftop installation to buy "plug-in" models, which can be fitted to balconies or other outdoor spaces.

Gemma Grimes, director of policy and delivery at the Solar Energy UK trade association, said: "Alongside initiatives in the [government's] Warm Homes Plan - which will include additional sources of finance for households - the creation of solar bonds could help many more households to benefit from solar and battery storage, providing lower energy bills, and increased energy independence."

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero told the Guardian that ministers were already promoting clean energy and lowering energy bills, including by cutting VAT on electricity, which would take £45 off bills, and a further £150 from annual bills removed by changes to "green levies", although that was partly offset by rising costs.

Miatta Fahnbulleh, the energy secretary, said: "Homegrown power is the only way to deliver energy security for the country and financial security for families. The British people are showing record demand for solar power, with almost 150,000 installations in the first six months of 2026 - equivalent to one every 74 seconds. We are also bringing in zero and low-interest loans for solar panels, batteries and heat pumps which could save families £550 a year."

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Charlotte Caldwell and her son Billy at their home in Castlederg, Northern Ireland, in 2022

PHOTOGRAPH: BRIAN LAWLESS/PA

‘Billy’s thriving’ Boy who helped legalise cannabis-based medicine marks milestone

Rory Carroll
Ireland correspondent

When Billy Caldwell was a baby he was not expected to survive infancy. A severe form of epilepsy condemned him to daily seizures - brutal, draining affairs, and each one potentially fatal.

“They couldn’t get the seizures under control,” his mother, Charlotte, said. “Billy was sent home to die - we were told he wouldn’t see past his first birthday.”

That prediction was in 2005. Last month Billy, who has autism, celebrated his 21st birthday at home in Northern Ireland with family, friends, cake and a wide smile.

He is alive, free of seizures and something of a celebrity: the boy who helped to legalise cannabis-based medicine in the UK.

“It was something I didn’t even dare dream about,” Charlotte said this week from the family home in Castlederg, County Tyrone. “It’s beyond words that Billy has reached 21. He’s not just surviving, he’s thriving.”

Billy is able to walk and relishes trips to the sea, she said. “His balance has become really good; he can go up and down steps for the first time. And he loves the beach, even in winter.” It is an upbeat outcome to a story that for many years was marked by anguish.

The Caldwells played a key role in the campaign to allow medical cannabis to be prescribed for some conditions

PHOTOGRAPH: CHARLOTTE CALDWELL

Billy survived infancy and made it into boyhood with a cocktail of drugs but the disease still raged inside his body, at times inflicting hundreds of seizures a day, said Charlotte. “He was completely depleted. He was being tube-fed. He couldn’t stand up.”

When the drugs stopped working, Charlotte took Billy to a specialist in Chicago in 2010 who tweaked and refined treatment, including a change to his diet, which helped control the seizures. Then in June 2016, when Billy was almost 11, the seizures returned “with a vengeance”, prompting the family to return to the specialist. After diagnostic tests, he referred Billy to a medical cannabis expert.

After treatment with cannabidiol (CBD), a chemical produced by the cannabis plant that does not get you high, Billy’s symptoms eased.

In 2017, the Caldwells returned to Northern Ireland. A GP prescribed further doses until May 2018 when the NHS told him to stop. Under UK law, a prescription for cannabis-based treatment needed to be based on clinical trials. With Billy’s medicine running out, the Caldwells flew to Toronto, Canada, where a paediatric neurologist running trials prescribed CBD. When the family returned to the UK, customs officials at Heathrow confiscated the medicine.

“That was on the Monday. By Wednesday Billy had his first seizure,” said Charlotte. “On Friday morning he had a prolonged seizure and was blue-lighted to Chelsea children’s hospital in an ambulance. They treated him with hands tied behind their back because Billy’s medicine was in the vaults of the Home Office two and a half miles down the road.”

Amid a public outcry the Conservative government granted the family a licence for cannabis oil to treat Billy. Weeks later the government accepted evidence of therapeutic benefit for some conditions and announced a relaxation of laws governing access to cannabis-derived medicine.

Billy, the symbol of the breakthrough, returned home to Northern Ireland and received treatment on the NHS, for which the family is grateful.

The seizures abated and disappeared, said Charlotte, except for a week in 2023 during a temporary supply glitch. Billy has had no seizures since. “Prescription cannabis has not only given me back my right as a mummy to hope, but more importantly has given Billy his right back to life,” she said.

However, NHS prescriptions are severely restricted, forcing many patients into a private system that is expensive and inconsistent, said Charlotte. She has founded an advocacy group, Transparent Responsible Adult-Use Controlled Data (Tracd), to lobby for change.

Charlotte remains grateful for what she has. “Billy is still here, he’s still alive. That’s my drive. I couldn’t wish for anything better. I’m just happy.”

Meta boss Zuckerberg snaps up a castle to use as his Irish base

Rory Carroll
Ireland correspondent

It stretches the definition of pied-à-terre but Mark Zuckerberg now has a pad in Ireland: Strancally Castle.

The Meta chief executive and his wife, Priscilla Chan, have bought the Gothic-style mansion and its 440-acre estate in county Waterford to use as a base during visits to Ireland.

“Mark and his family are excited to continue caring for this historic home and look forward to spending time in Ireland, where Meta maintains its international headquarters,” a spokesperson said yesterday. The price paid in the off-market deal is unknown but the Irish Times estimated a value between €20m and €30m - approximately a tenth of the cost of his 387ft superyacht.

The castle was built in 1830 for John Keily, a former Conservative MP, and designed on a lavish scale by the architects James and George Richard Pain, with a “brisk walk of four and a half minutes” needed to go from the dining room to the kitchen, according to the book The Houses of Ireland.

Michael Alen-Buckley, co-founder of the London-based investment firm RAB Capital, and his wife Giancarla, a scion of the family behind the Rocco Forte Hotels group, bought the estate and renovated it in the early 2000s.

“We leave our home of 25 years fondly and are grateful for the opportunity we have been given to save and restore Strancally Castle,” the couple said.

“We are delighted that Mark and his family intend to build on our stewardship by continuing to invest in maintaining and enhancing the property and grounds as their home in a sustainable manner.”

Strancally Castle, a Gothic-style mansion and estate in Waterford, was renovated by its previous owners

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Durham gallery aims to light up the local cultural scene

Mark Brown
North of England correspondent

Stuart Haygarth's piece Shadey Family (2024) at The Light, which will open to the public tomorrow

PHOTOGRAPHS: GARY CALTON/THE GUARDIAN

Works by Tracey Emin, Steve McQueen and Olafur Eliasson have gone on display at a new contemporary art gallery and museum in Durham that is aiming to show works of international significance.

The Light is a £17m redevelopment of a museum in the city that closed 10 years ago to considerable local uproar.

Then it was the Durham Light Infantry Museum and Art Gallery. Today it is just The Light, which opens to the public tomorrow with, on one floor, galleries telling military stories in a more human and modern way, while upstairs is 500 sq metres (5,400 sq ft) of space for contemporary art shows.

The opening is part of a bigger cultural story of getting arts and culture to places in England that have felt overlooked and forgotten.

The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art opened in Gateshead in 2002 and MIMA – the venue for this year's Turner Prize – opened in Middlesbrough in 2007.

They were followed by the likes of Firstsite in Colchester and the Hepworth in Wakefield. But new publicly funded regional galleries had largely dried up until now.

Tony Guillan, who joined as artistic director three months ago, said his story played into that narrative. "I grew up on Tyneside but then left, as many people do, at the age of 18." He worked in London at organisations including the Tate and the Southbank Centre. "I always thought it would be nice to come back, but there has been a dearth of opportunity.

"Why do you have to leave and move so far away if you want to have a certain type of career? I think perhaps more than any country in Europe we're so centralised in London, it feels like it has far too many industries, not least the creative and cultural industries."

The development of The Light has been a long, slow process and it opens in a county where, since Labour was virtually wiped out in the 2024 local election, Reform is the party running the show politically.

The Light is funded by the county council but there was little sign in the opening exhibition that curators might be looking over their shoulders in terms of the art they display.

It includes works that address themes including immigration. Art will always have a contentious side, Guillan said.

"We've recently showed all the politicians and our corporate leadership around. They love what we're doing. They love the ambition. They are really ambitious. So I'm very confident we're going to have the kind of space to explore what we want to."

Curators said they wanted the inaugural exhibition, Victory Over the Sun: Encounter With Light, to show contemporary art of national and international significance.

Others on display include the US artist Dan Flavin, famous for his use of fluorescent light tubes, and the Cuban-born US conceptual artist Félix González-Torres, who died in 1996 aged 38. His piece, his first use of lightbulbs, was made after the death of his partner Ross Laycock from an Aids-related illness and is about their unending love.

Natasha Howes, who curated the opening show, said she had worked hard to include a good number of women because too many exhibitions were dominated by white men.

"Last year I was looking at a festival in Spain and I think there were 30 artists and no women. I just thought: 'How is that allowed to happen?'"

> ***'I'm confident we're going to have the kind of space to explore what we want to'***
>
> **Tony Guillan**
> *Artistic director*

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Hilary Jack's No Borders (2018), and in the far room Liz West's Our Spectral Vision (2016). Below, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Pulse Index (2010). Bottom, the exterior of the redeveloped museum

Disability campaigner's death in plane crash is ruled accidental

Raphael Boyd

The death of a disability campaigner after a microlight crash while filming a TV programme for Apple was an accident, a coroner has concluded.

An inquest heard yesterday that Claire Lomas, 44, died of severe traumatic injuries on 22 August 2024, five weeks after a light aircraft that she had been piloting while filming a promotional video for Apple's Vision Pro headset veered off the runway and crashed into a rock in Amman, Jordan, on 15 July.

After she was paralysed from the waist down in a horseriding accident in 2007, Lomas became a charity campaigner, raising more than £900,000 for the Nicholls Spinal Injury Foundation. She was the first person to finish a marathon with the aid of a "bionic" suit when she completed the London Marathon in 2012.

The inquest heard the Royal Aero Sports Club of Jordan had concluded there was no violation of ground or air safety procedures, and that there was no evidence that the 180-degree camera mounted to the aircraft had adversely affected the flight.

Concerns about Lomas's confidence to fly the microlight were also explored during the hearing.

Louise Pinder, the senior coroner for Rutland and North Leicestershire, recorded her death as accidental, telling the hearing that during an attempt by Lomas to abort her landing and go around again, "the aircraft touched down firmly, veered to the left, the left wheel leaving the road on to gravel causing her to further lose control. The aircraft collided with rocks approximately 10 metres from the metalled road surface, as a result of which she sustained multiple traumatic injuries."

Pinder added: "I have heard no evidence establishing a causal link between any deficiencies in the risk assessment and Claire's death.

"I am reassured, as I hope the family will be, that there have been thorough investigations."

Katherine Allen, a lawyer speaking on behalf of the Lomas family, said: "Claire was deeply loved and her death has left a profound and enduring void in their lives. They will never be the same again."

Claire Lomas was fatally injured when her microlight crashed in 2024

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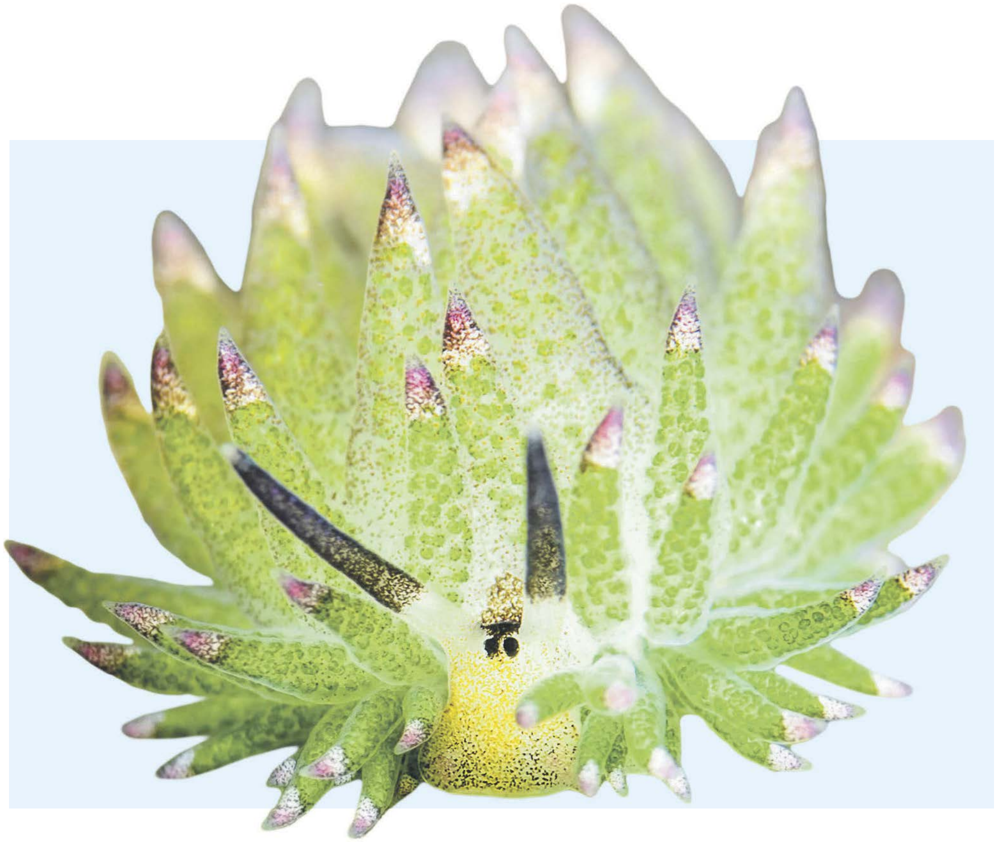
The Guardian

Solar-powered slug beats bee to win Invertebrate of the Year prize

Patrick Barkham



▶ *The leaf sheep faced strong competition from the Patagonian bee, below. Fourth place went to the common woodlouse, top*

PHOTOGRAPH: MARLI WAKELING/ALAMY

A neon green solar-powered slug that lives underwater is the winner of the Invertebrate of the Year competition run by the Guardian.

The leaf sheep, *Costasiella kuroshimae*, triumphed in the global ballot after hundreds of thousands of readers around the world read about and shared their appreciation for the spineless creatures who make up the majority of animal life on Earth.

Announcing the winner, the broadcaster and environmental campaigner Chris Packham said: "It's very, very beautiful but also very smart too. It harvests photosynthetic material from the algae it feeds upon and builds its own solar panels."

In a much closer contest than previous years – when the tardigrade and the common earthworm won with popular landslides – the beady-eyed, charming leaf sheep fought off strong competition from the world's largest bumblebee, the moscardón, *Bombus dahlbomii*, which finished second. This giant ginger bumblebee is increasingly threatened in its native Patagonia because of invasive bumblebee species introduced by humans in recent decades.

In third place was the horseshoe crab, a remarkable arthropod that pre-dates the dinosaurs and contains blue blood, closely followed by the common woodlouse.

Although worms have historically polled very strongly in the competition, bringing up the rear in 10th place was the astonishing bootlace worm, one of the longest animals in the world.

The annual competition was launched three years ago to celebrate overlooked and often derided invertebrates, who number at least 1.7m species – about 97% of all animals – with probably millions more still to be discovered and described by science. Without the unpaid labour of wild invertebrates who pollinate crucial crops, filter water, recycle waste, clean up pollution and add fertility to soils, human life on Earth would quickly perish.

This year, thousands of candidates nominated by Guardian readers were whittled down to a shortlist of 10.

As each candidate was announced during a two-week fiesta of invertebrate appreciation, experts offered their perspectives with Erica McAlister extolling the importance – and beauty – of flies, the wildlife photographer Dara Ojo revealing the joys of macro photography, and Connor Butler pointing out how there is no "other" in the natural world: we are all part of the same living systems.

The leaf sheep, which lives in tropical waters around Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines, was only first described by science in 1993. Since then, it has become increasingly celebrated in human culture thanks to advances in underwater macro photography that have revealed its remarkably cute appearance, which has inspired at least one Pokémon character.

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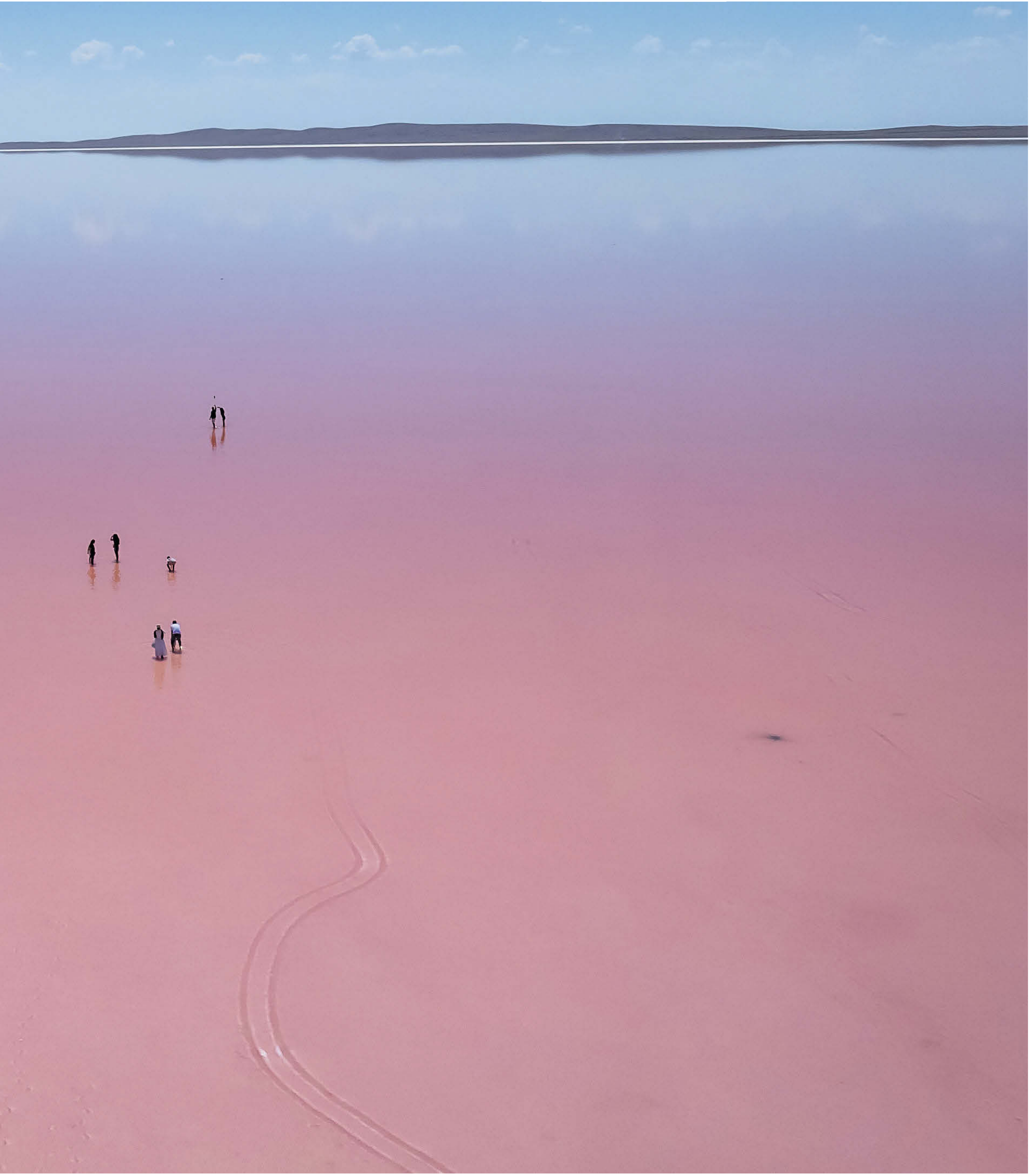
Eyewitness

▼ Lake Tuz, Turkey
Visitors wade in the vibrant pink shallows of Lake Tuz, about 90 miles south-east of Ankara. The water's striking colour during the summer is believed to be caused by an increase in salinity, high temperatures and microalgae that produce beta-carotene as a protective shield

PHOTOGRAPH: ISMAIL ASLANDAG/ANADOLU/GETTY



World

Ben-Gvir gloats in video of gallows site for Palestinians convicted under new law

Peter Beaumont
Senior international correspondent

Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, has posted a gloating video of the construction of a gallows complex where Palestinians convicted of terror offences will be hanged.

Ben-Gvir, who has attracted international sanctions and condemnation for his activities, said the new execution site would be equipped with viewing booths for families of victims to watch the hangings.

He posted the video on social media of a visit he had made to the unidentified location, where he can be seen pointing at foundations being laid and boasting it was where "terrorists will be executed".

Photographs in the Israeli media showed a bulldozer and heavy construction work in a cordoned-off area, reportedly close to a prison.

"I promised to worsen the conditions of terrorists in prisons - we kept it," said Ben-Gvir in the video. "I promised to pass the Death Penalty for Terrorists law - we did. And now the death row and hanging facility are also starting to take shape."

Reports of the construction of the gallows, which will execute only Palestinians convicted of terror offences in the military courts system, and not Jewish extremists, follows the passage of new law earlier this year.

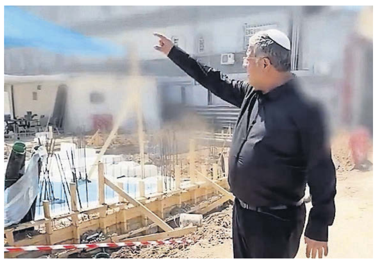
The law requires military courts to apply the death penalty as the only available sentence, unless the court finds special circumstances allowing for life imprisonment. Jewish Israelis are in effect protected by a provision that applies the law only to murder committed with the "intent to deny the existence of the state of Israel".

Ben-Gvir himself has convictions for incitement to racism, interfering with a police officer performing his duty, and support for a terrorist organisation (the banned Kach movement). He has served as Israel's national security minister since 2022 except for a two-month gap last year.

Ben-Gvir, who is one of the main drivers behind the new death penalty law, has a long history of extremist statements and provocations. He celebrated his 50th birthday in May with the gift of a birthday cake decorated with the iced image of a noose.

The law, one of two passed by Israeli MPs this year, has drawn widespread international condemnation since it passed the Knesset by 62 votes to 48 despite allegations that it is fundamentally discriminatory.

Erika Guevara-Rosas, a senior director at Amnesty International, said on the law's passage: "It also dismantles fundamental safeguards to prevent the arbitrary deprivation of life and protect the right to a fair trial, and further empowers Israel's system of apartheid, which is maintained by scores of discriminatory laws against Palestinians."



▲ *Itamar Ben-Gvir points towards the gallows site under construction*

In recent months, Ben-Gvir became the subject of sanctions by France and Ireland in addition to UK sanctions imposed on him last year. Just days ago, he attracted widespread criticism for advocating a policy of punitive killings in Gaza of 30 to 40 people a night.

"I think we should be doing 30 to 40 targeted assassinations per night," Ben-Gvir said. "Not just those who pose an immediate threat. There are people there who don't deserve to live … They are not even people."

The French foreign minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, this week called Ben-Gvir's comments "unacceptable and inhuman", while the German chancellor, Friedrich Merz, said he strongly condemned "the inhumane appeals made by minister Ben-Gvir, which violate international law".

The UN secretary general, António Guterres, called Ben-Gvir's comments "appalling", "outrageous", "dehumanising" and "dangerous".

The video emerged amid growing international condemnation of Israel's behaviour, including the issuing of tenders for the massive E1 settlement block outside Jerusalem. This was denounced by the foreign secretary, Ed Miliband, as an "unacceptable and destructive act" that risked separating the West Bank from East Jerusalem. He summoned Israel's chargé d'affaires in protest.

"The UK has been clear privately and publicly in our opposition to E1 and our support for a two-state solution as the only way to ensure long-term security and peace for both Palestinians and Israelis," Miliband said. "All settlements damage that prospect and are a flagrant breach of international law."

IDF decision sparks fury

The family of Australian aid worker Zomi Frankcom has described a decision by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) not to open a criminal investigation into her death in Gaza as deeply disappointing.

Israel's decision prompted outrage from Australia yesterday, with the prime minister, Anthony Albanese, insisting he would press for justice for Frankcom and her colleagues. Albanese said her family deserved a "far more transparent and clear explanation".

Frankcom was one of seven World Central Kitchen employees killed in an April 2024 strike on a convoy of their vehicles.

The group had coordinated with the Israeli military over the movement of its convoy.

"Three clearly marked humanitarian vehicles travelling in a humanitarian fire control zone were struck successively as survivors attempted to move from one vehicle to another," Frankcom's family said.

The IDF said on Wednesday it had mistaken several individuals in the vehicles for armed Hamas military operatives, and that the convoy deviated from the previously coordinated route.

It concluded that "the decisions of the commanders did not raise reasonable suspicion of criminal misconduct".

Tom McIlroy

▶ *A funeral for victims recovered from the rubble of Israeli strikes takes place in Gaza City yesterday*
PHOTOGRAPH: OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP/GETTY

Trump takes aim at Iran's economy with threat to country's trading partners

Jonathan Yerushalmy

Donald Trump has announced a campaign to isolate Iran's economy, threatening "tremendous economic consequences" for any country that helps or does business with Tehran, a move that could set up a fresh confrontation with China if implemented.

"Today, I am announcing the most crushing economic operation ever taken against any country!" Trump wrote on Truth Social.

"Any country that allows its financial institutions, businesses, airports, or government entities to provide any type of lifeline to Iran will itself face tremendous economic consequences."

His announcement contained no detail on what actions would be taken or which countries could be affected, and comes as the war nears its six-month mark, with the president facing pressure over the cost of the conflict as the US midterm elections approach.

Last month Trump paused attacks on Iran after a fortnight of nightly strikes failed to bring officials in Tehran back to the negotiating table and reports that the war had run down US stockpiles of key munitions.

Pentagon advisers reportedly told Trump the US had nearly exhausted its list of targets in Iran and that the military campaign had reached the limits of its effectiveness.

The White House has signalled in recent weeks a shift in strategy. The US treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, said last week that the US would begin ramping up efforts to isolate Iran economically.

The US Treasury has for months been carrying out an effort, called Operation Economic Fury, to cut off Iran's funding with targeted sanctions, while a naval blockade in the strait of Hormuz has sought to block Iranian ports from exporting oil vital to keeping the country's economy afloat.

Iran's economy already faces a punishing array of US and western sanctions that have ground down the economy over years and curtailed its ability to sell oil. But experts say the country's leaders have learned to adapt to the measures, including by exporting oil through a sophisticated network of shadow tankers.

In his announcement on Wednesday, Trump listed several activities that he said needed to stop immediately, including "oil smuggling, swap lines, cash transfers, exchange houses, ship registries, front companies".

The wording of the announcement suggested that he could be threatening secondary sanctions on countries that buy Iranian oil, but experts say

Baby Shark grows up
Face of viral hit makes K-pop debut
Page 27

No plane sailing
Fierce winds ramp up the 'Welly welcome'
Page 30

More than 100 feared dead after cave-in at Central African Republic mine

Eromo Egbejule
Cotonou

More than 100 people are believed to have died after an artisanal goldmine at a small village in western Central African Republic (CAR) caved in as a result of a landslide, according to local officials and aid workers.

The landslide happened on Tuesday afternoon in the village of Zamboye, about 31 miles from the town of Baboua and close to the border with Cameroon. Video on social media appears to show an avalanche of sand engulfing a group of people.

A statement on Wednesday by a local public prosecutor said many others were trapped. It did not mention the number of fatalities but Gervais Ganagoroh, a Red Cross volunteer involved in the relief effort, told the Associated Press more than 100 bodies had been recovered. An official at a local mining association confirmed that number to Reuters.

Local media in CAR reported that authorities had launched an investigation into the incident. A second prosecutor from Baboua told the press the incident was believed to have been caused by "the collapse of several underground tunnels".

A miner at the site, Cedric Mbango, told Agence France-Presse: "The ground completely collapsed and buried people." He described the incident as "catastrophic".

Rescuers are racing to find survivors and retrieve bodies of victims. Authorities in Cameroon's Eastern region said at least three of its citizens had been identified as victims.

Grégoire Mvongo, the region's governor, told state-owned radio on Wednesday that he was "working in close collaboration with our Central African colleagues to deal with the aftermath of this tragedy".

Bertrand Be Yangué, of the Zamboye youth council, said finding miners alive "would be a miracle". He added: "We are saddened and heartbroken to see young men and women perish after coming to the mines to save their families from despair."

The toll was expected to rise as the rescue efforts continued, he said.

The CAR website Corbeau News reported that heavy machinery was being used in the retrieval mission and there were fears it could jeopardise the rescue of those still alive.

The number of people in the mine at the time of the cave-in is unknown.

Illegal small-scale artisanal mines are common in different parts of Africa and often operate with weak safety standards.

◀ *Shoppers in a bazaar in Tehran, where economic sanctions and high inflation have driven up prices*
PHOTOGRAPH: ABEDIN TAHERKENAREH/EPA

such a move could lead to direct confrontation with China – Iran's biggest trading partner – at a time when the US is trying to establish a new trading relationship with Beijing.

"Whatever new economic measures the US can use will need to be directed at Iran's trading partners," said Gregory Brew, a senior analyst at Eurasia Group, adding that it will be "hard for the US to direct such actions at China, the country that matters most to Iran's economic future."

China's leader, Xi Jinping, is expected to visit the US next month, further complicating any efforts to target Beijing's imports of Iranian oil.

Mohammad Mokhber, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, said on Tuesday that military pressure and sanctions would not break Iran's resolve. He added that Iran remained open to dialogue with the US, but would not confuse negotiations with surrender, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

Also on Tuesday, the United Arab Emirates announced it would suspend all trade activities, commercial exchanges and financial transactions with Iran, after it said it had detected two missiles launched from the country. Tehran dismissed the reports as baseless.

Before the war, the UAE was one of Iran's biggest trade partners, providing more than 30% of its imports.

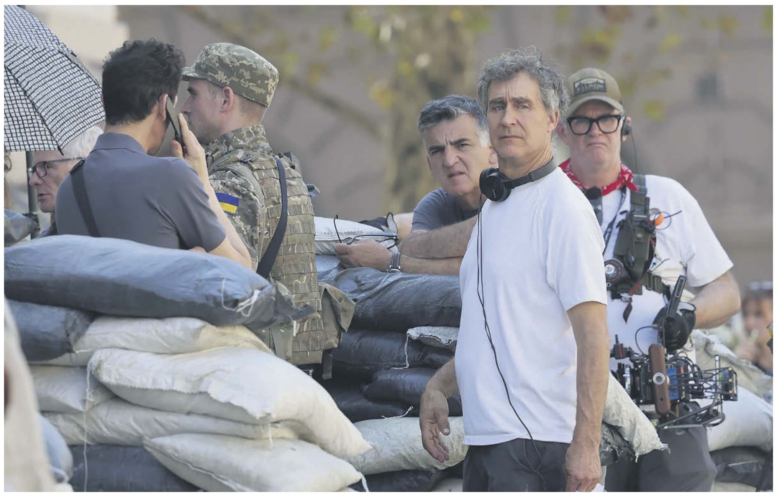
Before Wednesday's announcement, Trump claimed that vessels from Gulf countries allied with the US were continuing to move through the strait of Hormuz, despite the Iranian threat to shipping in the waterway. He said the US military was aiding ships in the strait, saying "right now, a lot of boats are coming through".

Axios reported that US forces had been facilitating the transit of 15 to 20 ships in and out of the strait each night in recent weeks – carrying "roughly half the prewar volume" of daily oil shipments – while also continuing to blockade Iranian exports. Those volumes were disputed by some, with ship-tracking data from Kpler showing transits remained low.

Referring to the Axios report, Danny Citrinowicz, the former head of the Iran branch of Israeli military intelligence, said it was an important operational development, but questioned how long the US government would be able to sustain such an operation. "More importantly, this will not force Iran to surrender or fundamentally change its negotiating position," he said.

Nord Stream detainee was a consultant on Sean Penn film

Luke Harding
Jakub Krupa



▲ *Adrien Brody, far left and director Doug Liman on the set of Snake Island. Below, Volodymyr Zhuravlev attends Warsaw district court*

PHOTOGRAPH: PIXSELL/ALAMY NEWS

Earlier this month locals in Zagreb noticed something odd outside an art deco building. Sandbags and barricades appeared in front of the Esplanade hotel, along with a film crew and extras sporting Ukrainian military uniforms. Soon afterwards the actors Sean Penn and Adrien Brody were spotted on the set, together with Doug Liman, the director of the Jason Bourne movies.

Liman had come to shoot his latest fictional political thriller. Its subject: the 2022 Nord Stream explosions, in which Ukrainian divers allegedly blew up a pipeline supplying Russian natural gas to Germany. One of the chief suspects, Volodymyr Zhuravlev, had eluded the Germany authorities: once allegedly slipping out of Poland in the boot of a diplomatic car and on another occasion freed by a court.

On Wednesday, however, Zhuravlev's luck ran out. He was detained in the Croatian city of Pula – where, in an incredible meta-twist, German media said he had been acting as a consultant on Liman's movie, Snake Island, which reconstructs Zhuravlev's alleged act of watery sabotage.

Photos in Croatian newspapers showed two police officers leading away Zhuravlev, a middle-aged figure in a blue T-shirt and brown cap. In an interview before the Ukrainian's extraordinary arrest, Liman confirmed parts of the movie would be shot in Pula, on the Adriatic coast. "It's a little hot [in Zagreb]. I'm excited to be by the water," he told a TV crew.

Who tipped off the authorities, and what exactly Zhuravlev was doing in Croatia, is unclear, and the film's production company has yet to issue an explanation. German federal prosecutors said local police forces detained him on a European arrest warrant. They described Zhuravlev as a professional scuba diver, and said he was part of a group led by another Ukrainian, Serhiy K, who was extradited in 2025 to Germany from Italy. Both had links to Ukrainian state entities, the prosecutors suggested, and had planted explosives on behalf of their shadowy intelligence bosses.

The two Ukrainian divers have denied any involvement in the undersea blasts, which took place off the Danish island of Bornholm. The Ukrainian government says it had nothing to do with the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines and says it wanted to establish the "true circumstances" of the incident, noting it happened amid Russia's "aggressive war against Ukraine".

Zhuravlev's lawyers will now seek to stop their client from being sent to Germany, where if convicted he is likely to face a lengthy prison sentence. His Ukrainian lawyer, meanwhile, wants Zhuravlev returned to Ukraine.

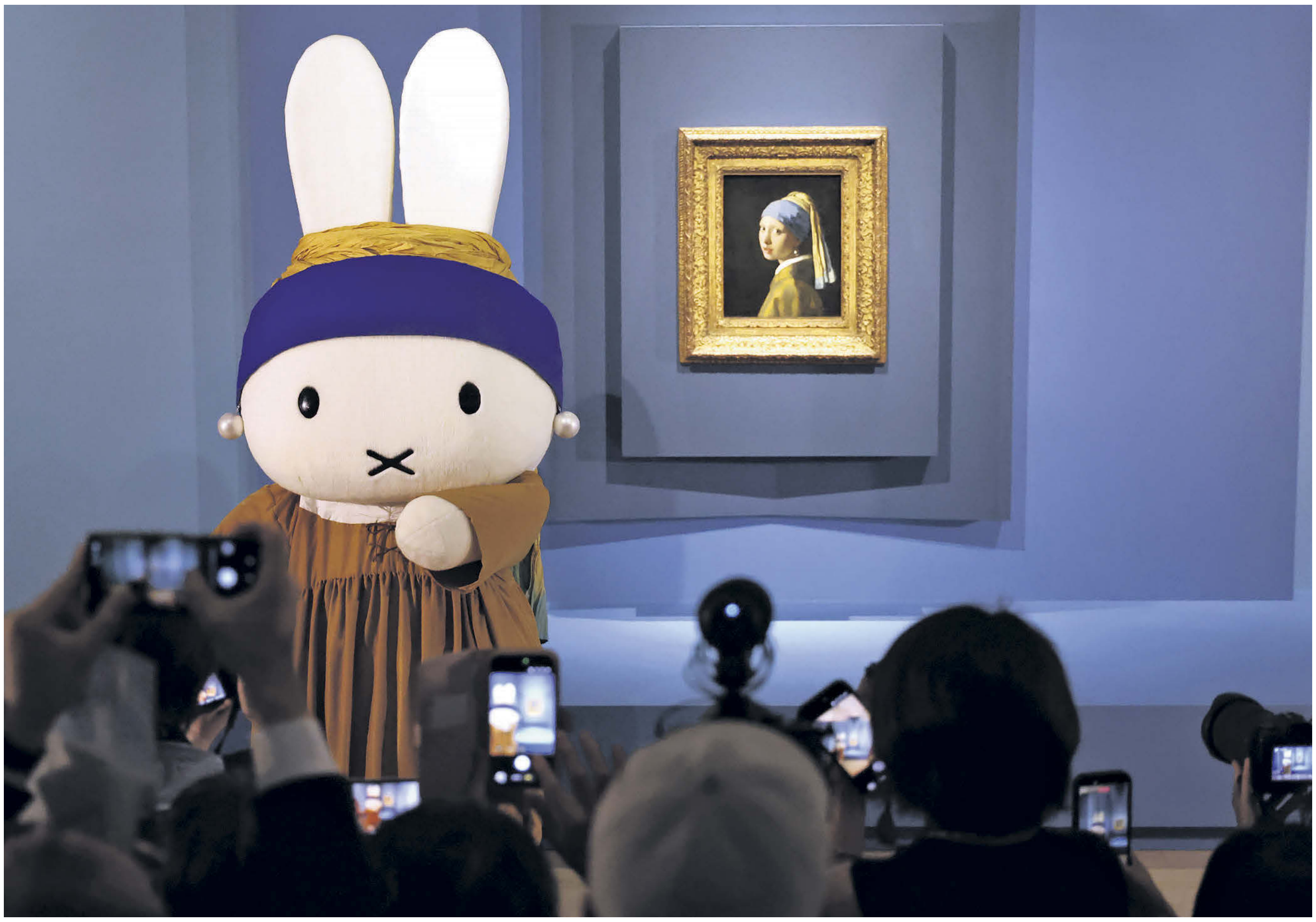
But if he stays in Croatia, his Polish defence lawyer Tymoteusz Paprocki said the case will once again be "precedent-setting" – because a Croatian court will effectively hear a matter already decided in Poland, another EU member state.

Last year a Polish court ruled against executing a European arrest warrant issued by Germany, arguing that Germany had no jurisdiction and that the destruction of Nord Stream could be seen as a justified action by Ukraine as part of a defensive war. Most of the billions used by the Kremlin to fund its vast army comes from oil and natural gas exports.

The ruling aligned with Poland's longstanding opposition to the pipeline project, seen as a symbol of Berlin's over-close relations with Russia under successive German chancellors. The Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, has said publicly that "the problem with Nord Stream 2 is not that it was blown up. The problem is that it was built."

Paprocki said he had no detailed information about the arrest, but confirmed Zhuravlev was not in Croatia on holiday – "He must have had serious and important reasons" to go there, he added, without offering details – and the newspaper Die Welt said there were indications Zhuravlev was a part of the production.

Published photos in Croatian media from the set of Snake Island showed Brody in front of the Esplanade hotel with Liman giving him instructions. Penn was not on set but was reportedly seen inside the building, which is located in Mihanovićeva Street in the centre of Zagreb.



Miffy and the old master
Johannes Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring inspires a new look for Miffy. The little rabbit, wildly popular in Japan, helped to launch an exhibition of 17th-century Dutch painting that opens in Osaka today.

PHOTOGRAPH: JIJI PRESS/EPA

Woman, 84, found alive in rubble days after quake in Indonesia

Kate Lamb

An 84-year-old woman was found alive in the flattened remains of her home three days after a powerful earthquake hit eastern Indonesia, authorities have confirmed.

The 7.7-magnitude quake struck off Indonesia's Flores island on Saturday, killing at least 73 people, injuring more than 900 and displacing nearly 60,000 others.

A landslide triggered by the quake had blocked access to Nitunglea village, where Paulina Pobi lived, leaving the elderly woman buried for three days under the collapsed bamboo walls of her home until Tuesday.

Police told local media the woman was safely evacuated and taken to the nearest health centre for treatment.

"Because she was paralysed, she couldn't move or speak, so it wasn't until the fourth day that her family finally found her," another local official, Rudolfus Riba, told Agence France-Presse.

"She is in good health; there were no injuries at all. She was just a bit weak because she hadn't eaten or drunk anything for days. It feels unreal, almost like a miracle."

Grocery stores, petrol stations and other shops have begun to reopen on the island, but debris still covers streets, and searchers continue to dig in the rubble for victims.

Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency said 398 tons of aid, including food, tents, refugee shelters and donations from the public, have been transported to affected communities.

But the distribution process has been slowed by mountainous terrain in Flores and roads damaged by the shallow quake. The government had expanded the use of military aircraft, ships and personnel to support emergency operations in the remote areas, disaster agency spokesperson Berton Panjaitan said in a video statement.

More than 3,000 aftershocks have been recorded since Saturday, at least 86 of them strong enough to be felt by residents, according to Indonesia's geological agency.

The tremors have made many too afraid to return to their damaged homes.

The regional police chief, Rudi Darmoko, said: "These refugees are not only physically injured, but they also have mental health issues that we must not ignore, especially for children."

Indonesia lies on the "Ring of Fire", a zone of intense seismic and volcanic activity that stretches from Japan through south-east Asia and across the Pacific Ocean.

In 2004, an earthquake off the coast of Sumatra triggered a tsunami that killed 220,000 people across the region, including 170,000 in Indonesia.

◀ *Geonroung Park, aged seven, performs in the viral hit, which is YouTube's most watched video*
PHOTOGRAPH: THE PINKFONG COMPANY

Riding the wave Baby Shark boy back 10 years after viral hit

Raphael Rashid
Seoul

'I just remember having fun dancing and playing on what felt like a huge set," Geonroung Park said, recalling the day 10 years ago when he was filmed, aged seven, performing the hand movements to a children's song about a family of sharks.

That footage became Baby Shark Dance, now the most-watched video in YouTube's history. It has racked up more than 17.2bn views and has held the platform's global no 1 spot for 69 consecutive months.

Despite becoming one of the most recognisable faces online, growing up as "the Baby Shark kid" was, Park says, mostly ordinary. Friends at school knew about the video and thought it was "cool", but otherwise treated him much like everyone else.

He remembers the song staying stuck in his head for a while after filming wrapped, catching himself humming it "without even realising it".

Park found fame in a song, yet almost nobody has actually heard him sing. The vocals belonged to another child performer. Now 17, Park is keen to change that.

"Ten years ago, I was dancing next to Baby Shark," he said. "Now, I want to share my own voice and the stories I've written myself."

Park made his debut yesterday as the K-pop singer Baby Shark Boy, releasing his first single, Wave, featuring Joohoney of Monsta X, the K-pop group whose members once performed the Baby Shark choreography during its viral peak.

Wave opens with the familiar Baby Shark melody before shifting into an electropop sound, a structure Park says mirrors his own journey. "To me, Baby Shark Dance feels like the first wave that started 10 years ago", he said. "That small wave grew into something much bigger than I ever could have imagined, and I feel like I've grown along with it.

"I also thought there was something fun and meaningful about the idea of the little boy who once danced to the song growing up and now sharing a new song in his own voice."

Geonroung Park: 'I want to share my own voice'

The clip Park featured in simmered for about a year before exploding in 2017 via the #BabySharkChallenge in Indonesia. It then got a further push from a run of other K-pop stars performing the choreography on television.

By 2019 it had reached 32 on the Billboard Hot 100 and no 6 on the UK singles chart, and had even become the walk-up song for a Major League Baseball team, the Washington Nationals.

The song itself is much older than the video. Baby Shark is widely believed to date back to North American summer camps in the 1970s, a singalong chant with hand motions that existed long before Park was born.

The company behind the video, then known as SmartStudy, uploaded an animated version in November 2015, then the choreography-led clip in June the next year, turning the folk tune into a singalong with a K-pop-style beat.

South Korea's supreme court settled the question of ownership last year, ruling against a children's songwriter who had claimed the song copied his own arrangement.

The Pinkfong Company, the South Korean children's entertainment firm that built Baby Shark into a global franchise, describes Park's single as a growth story, rather than a conventional idol launch. Park himself said it felt "more like a new beginning than a one-off project".

Park briefly reappeared last year in short-form video marking the song's 10th anniversary, which drew more than 24m views.

The teenager is keen to be known for more than a childhood clip and to "gradually find my own style as an artist" but is happy with the opportunity it has given him.

"To me, being the Baby Shark boy isn't a past I want to leave behind," he said.

Mayor bans cycling in central Como after being hit by ebike

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

The mayor of the Italian lakeside city of Como has banished bikes from the historic centre after being hit by one.

Alessandro Rapinese's ban, which comes into force in September, targets about 30 streets and means cyclists, on ebikes or push bikes, will have to dismount.

▲ *The ban, which comes into effect in September, covers about 30 streets*

Rapinese immediately came under fire, with residents and politicians from across the spectrum accusing him of waging a personal vendetta.

Activists have started a petition calling for him to overturn the rule and cyclists are planning to ride their bikes through the specified streets in mid-September in protest.

Rapinese told the Ansa news agency: "I've been accused of adopting this measure because I was hit by an electric bike - certainly, that is true. People act based on their own experiences and I know what it's like to be hit by one of these beasts."

The collision happened in June as Rapinese was leaving city hall, ironically just after his executive had met to discuss a measure restricting traffic in the centre. The rider has not been identified.

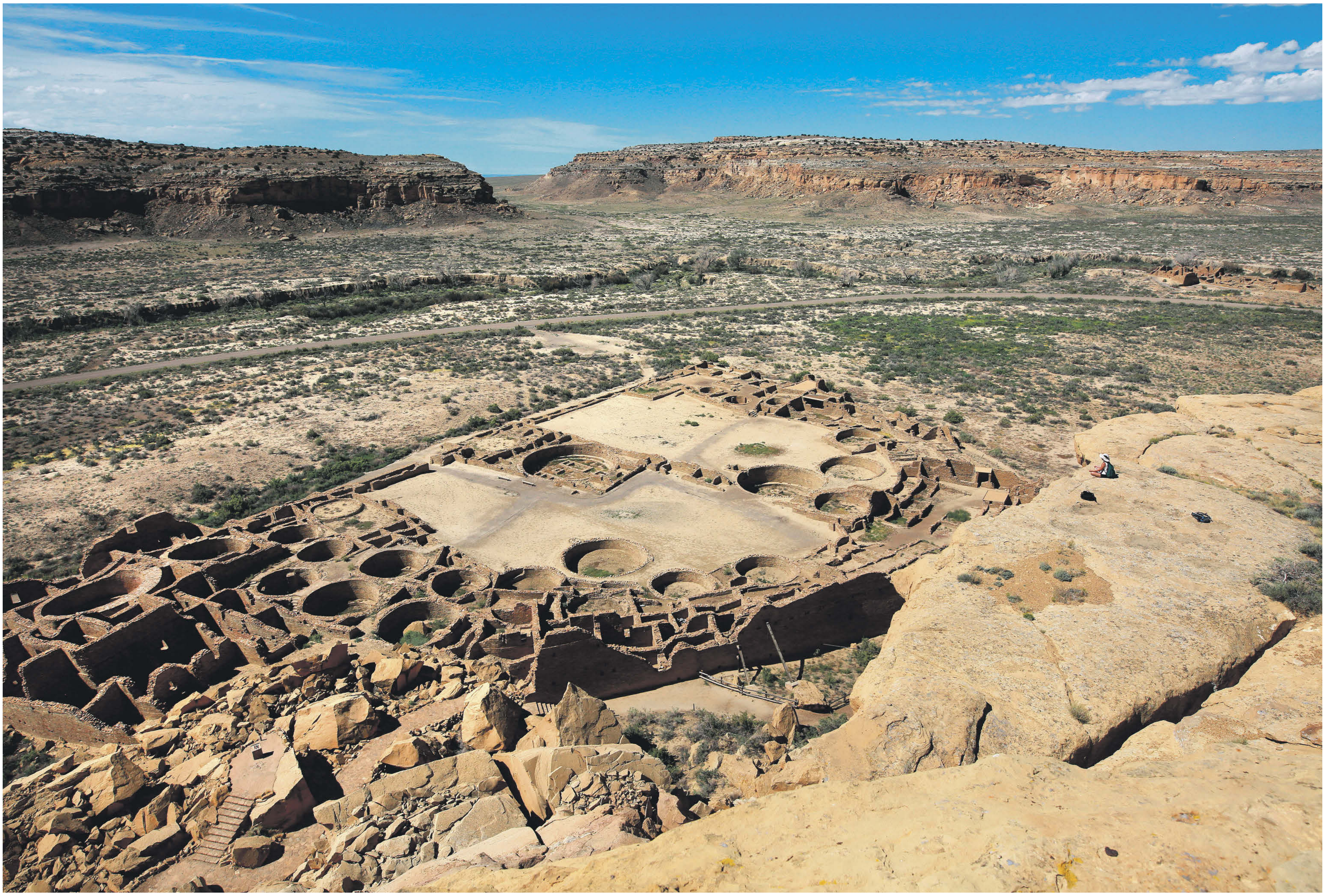
Rapinese said the ban was necessary for public safety, especially in a city packed with tourists. The measure applies to all bikes because Italy's highway code does not distinguish between ebikes and traditional ones. Rented e-scooters were banned in Como's city centre in 2022.

Critics say some of the streets affected are the widest in the centre, offering a smooth transit towards Lake Como, and that banning bikes excludes people from being able to use a low-cost, environmentally friendly mode of transport. The measure will especially affect delivery riders and shop owners depending on them for supplies.

The mayor has been urged to crack down on reckless behaviour rather than criminalising cyclists.

The Como branch of the centre-left Democratic party said: "Como deserves a mobility system that ensures pedestrian safety without penalising residents, workers and those who choose sustainable transport."

While expressing sympathy with Rapinese over the ebike collision, Paolo Emilio Russo, of Forza Italia, said the ban was "crazy".



Trump plan to allow oil and gas drilling next to 'sacred' heritage sites sparks alarm

Oliver Milman

The Trump administration's push to expand oil and gas extraction across the US is set to bring drilling near cherished natural and cultural sites, raising alarm among conservationists and prompting questions from the UN's heritage body.

Unesco said it had received information on the administration's plan to scrap a drilling-free buffer zone around Chaco Culture national historical park in New Mexico, a world heritage site and one of the most important cultural areas in the US.

A Unesco spokesperson said it had procedures regarding "potential threats" to a world heritage property and was awaiting a response from the federal government as to its impact.

"The world heritage committee has consistently considered extractive activities to be incompatible with world heritage status," a Unesco spokesperson said.

As well as warning about the consequences of drilling within the boundaries of world heritage sites, the spokesperson said the committee had "emphasised that projects proposed outside world heritage properties should not adversely affect their outstanding universal value", adding projects "should be subject to appropriate impact assessments before decisions are taken".

The US has 27 such sites, places protected by international treaty for their cultural, historical or scientific significance, including parks such as Yellowstone and Yosemite and landmarks including the Statue of Liberty.

Several sites have nearby drilling or mining projects, with Donald Trump's "drill, baby drill" approach leading to a sweeping opening up of forests, oceans and protected landscapes to the extraction of the fossil fuels dangerously heating the planet.

"We will be a rich nation again and it is the liquid gold under our feet that will help us do it," the president has said. "We have the largest amount of oil and gas of any country on Earth – and we are going to use it."

One US world heritage site, Florida's Everglades, is already listed as being "in danger" due to the impact of development and pollution. Others could join this list if nearby industrialisation is deemed harmful.

"Unesco follows developments that may have implications for world heritage properties and their outstanding universal value," said the organisation's spokesperson.

Republicans have lobbied Trump to remove a ban on uranium mining near the Grand Canyon, also a world heritage site, while the administration has leased thousands of acres for oil and gas drilling near the fragile underground cave systems in another listed site, the Carlsbad Caverns national park in New Mexico.

But it is at Chaco where the threat of oil and gas drilling looms largest.

▲ *Top, pueblo remains at Chaco in New Mexico, which is a Unesco world heritage site. Right, the Florida Everglades where manatees, below right, can be seen, is listed as 'in danger' from development*

PHOTOGRAPHS: CEDAR ATTANASIO/ AP PHOTO; JUPITER IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has proposed eradicating a 10-mile buffer zone shielding the protected area from industrial activity including fossil fuel drilling and uranium mining, a move that a broad coalition of opponents, including tribal leaders, archaeologists and green groups, warn could cause major environmental harm.

The plan to begin drilling into the 525 sq mile (336,000-acre) zone next to Chaco attracted 100,000 mostly hostile submissions in an unusually short 14-day public comment period that closed last month.

Deb Haaland, the former Democratic interior secretary who oversaw the creation of the buffer zone in 2023 during the Biden administration, said its removal would cause "irreversible damage". Haaland, who is Native American, said of Trump and Steve Pearce, director of the BLM: "Their attempt to profit off this sacred place shows a clear lack of consideration and disrespect for the lives that New Mexicans live."

The 53-sq-mile park in the state's north-west contains a trove of key cultural sites, including the ruins of pueblos, settlements of the Indigenous Pueblo peoples. The site is also internationally recognised as a dark skies area, ideal for viewing the stars.

"This park offers an incredible transportive experience where you essentially go back in time 1,000 years to experience what the ancient Pueblo people saw," said Maude Dinan, at the National Parks Conservation Association. "The buffer zone is incredibly important."

Allowing oil and gas development close to Chaco would introduce a toxic haze of air pollution that would cut visitor numbers, opponents have said, as well as spoil views, risk water pollution from fracking, and result in bright lights and gas flaring that would ruin the pristine dark skies.

Daniel Tso, a community leader in the region's Navajo community, has said he has allotments of land outside the buffer zone where the oil and gas industry has shown "total disregard for the community and total disrespect for the land holders". He fears the same situation closer to Chaco.

"I have allotments inside the buffer zone where the land is untouched, the aquifers are pristine," he said. "If the oil and gas companies go in there, the sacredness of that land is gone. Outside this zone, some of these oil and gas wells are within 100ft of Navajo people's homes, causing tremendous health impacts."

Dinan said she was pessimistic the outcry over the BLM's plan would be heeded, pointing to recent decisions to shrink the protected areas of two prized national monuments in Utah and to ditch a rule that safeguarded swathes of untouched forests.

"It makes me wonder where the line in the sand is. It feels that no matter how valuable or sacred a place is the administration is willing to trade it all in," she said. "Almost all of the federal land around places like Chaco and Carlsbad is already leased for oil and gas drilling, so the idea there's an urgent new demand for this is an illusion. There doesn't seem like a good co-existence at the moment."

The US department of the interior, which oversees the BLM, and the National Park Service did not respond to a request for comment.

▼ *Offices of a bilingual service firm in the Tabacalera area of Mexico City, where deportees can find work*

PHOTOGRAPHS: LUIS ANTONIO ROJAS

Mexico People deported from US by ICE find refuge in their own 'Little LA'

Oscar Lopez
Mexico City

With its wide avenues lined with tall palm trees, its quaint cafes and old-school cantinas, as well as the mix of English and Spanish spoken on the street, the Tabacalera neighbourhood in downtown Mexico City has a certain US feel – so much so that it is has become known as Little LA.

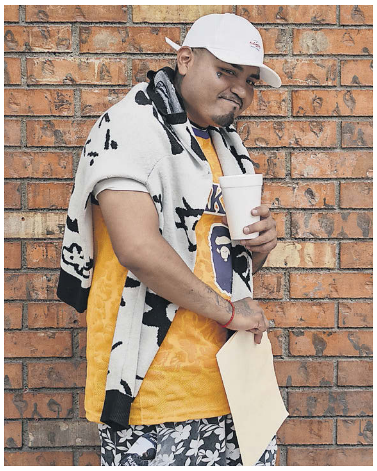
The nickname is about more than appearances. In recent years, this corner of the metropolis has become a haven for many Mexicans deported from the US, particularly those who spent years living across the border and for whom Mexico feels like a foreign country. In Little LA, they have found a more familiar place to belong.

With the Trump administration embarking on a huge anti-immigrant crackdown, deportations to Mexico are expected to surge. Since taking office for the second time in January 2025, Trump has deported about 145,500 Mexican nationals.

Christopher Gil Ortíz was one of them. He was on his way to work in Los Angeles in June this year when Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents stopped him, handcuffed him and threw him in detention.

After months of living in constant fear as an undocumented immigrant in Trump's US, Ortíz said that when the detention finally happened he felt relieved. "At this point I was like, OK, that's it, I'm going back," he recalled. "It's like they took a weight off my shoulders."

More than 30 years since he had left as a child, Ortíz was sent back to Mexico, leaving behind his wife and two young children. Dumped in the resort town of Tulum, he made his way to Cancún, only to have all his belongings stolen from his hotel room. Eventually, he ended up in Mexico City, where he had family.



▲ *Sergio Aaron Pérez in his Los Angeles Lakers jersey and cap*

"I was nervous," he said. "Even though I was born here, I have very vague memories of the city itself."

He was also facing the many challenges of being a deportee: getting his birth certificate, ID and finding a job. His sister sent him a TikTok post from an organisation called New Comienzos (New Beginnings). Based in Little LA, it was set up to help returnees reintegrate. When he saw the post, Ortiz decided to go to Little LA.

"There's a lot of people that are going through what I'm going through and I'm pretty sure there's going to be more," Ortiz said.

The New Comienzos founder and executive director, Israel Concha, said he was preparing for exactly that. "The atmosphere [in the US] right now is one of humanitarian crisis and panic. People no longer even want to take their children to school," Concha said. "You'll probably start seeing mass deportations in a few months."

> *'There's a lot of people going through what I'm going through, and I'm pretty sure there's going to be more'*
>
> **Christopher Gil Ortíz** *Deportee*

▲ *Anti-Trump graffiti near a bilingual call centre in Mexico City*

Concha founded New Comienzos when he witnessed first-hand how little support the Mexican government was offering recent arrivals. In 2012, he was living in Texas with his pregnant wife and had started a successful private transport business. He had lived in the US for 30 years. "I wanted to try to achieve that American dream, and I think I succeeded," he said.

Then one day he was caught speeding on his way to pick up a client. While in detention, he fought his case for two years but was deported in 2014. On his first day in Mexico, he was kidnapped by a criminal gang working with local police. "That was my welcome to my native country," he said.

After being severely beaten, Concha escaped to Mexico City, where he found a job at a bilingual call centre – one of several starting to pop up in Tabacalera, attracting young returnees who spoke fluent English. Less than a year later, he started New Comienzos to address the challenges faced by people like himself.

"People didn't just need a job; many of them needed emotional support because they had just lost everything following a deportation," he said. The organisation offers legal support and free English classes, as well as mentorship for recent arrivals. Little LA remains the organisation's centre of operations.

"A community reintegration lab," said Concha, "that's what we've created there in Little Los Angeles."

Sergio Aaron Pérez, 36, said the area felt like home. Wearing a Los Angeles Lakers jersey and baseball cap, his face and arms covered in tattoos, Pérez looked as though he had just stepped off the plane from the US. In fact, having lived there for more than 30 years, the former California resident was deported in 2011 for what he calls "bad things".

In Little LA, he found work at call centres. "If you speak English there's a lot of money," said Pérez. "There's a lot of community."

Ortíz, for his part, had little interest in a call centre job. He has applied for a role at a glass-making factory – work he used to do in the US. Next on his agenda: bringing his wife and children to Mexico.

"My kids are OK with it," he said. Referencing a local Mexican custom, he added: "My daughter told me that she was already practising drinking soda out of a plastic bag."

North Korea Ten missiles fired a day after South's drills reduced

Associated Press

North Korea has launched about 10 short-range ballistic missiles towards the sea, South Korea's military said, a day after Pyongyang shrugged off Donald Trump's order to scale back US military drills with South Korea in an apparent attempt to resume diplomacy.

The joint chiefs of staff said the missiles were launched from the region of Pyongyang at around 5pm local time yesterday towards North Korea's eastern waters.

The military said South Korea had bolstered its surveillance and was closely coordinating information on the launches with the US and Japan.

South Korea's presidential national security council held an emergency meeting, after which it issued a statement urging North Korea to halt ballistic missile launches, which are banned under UN security council resolutions.

The Japanese prime minister's office said earlier that it had detected a suspected missile launch.

On Wednesday, the South Korean and US militaries said they were scaling back their 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises. Donald Trump had ordered the Pentagon to "substantially reduce" the exercises just before they began on Monday. Explaining his reasons for the decision, the US president cited what he said was a good relationship with North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, and South Korea's refusal to support him over the war against Iran.

Kim Yo-jong, the influential sister of the North Korean leader, dismissed Trump's overture on Wednesday, saying it was not worthy of comment.

"The provocative, aggressive nature of the drills won't change even though their duration and size were reduced," she said. "If the US calculates that it can propagate its recent measure as one of so-called good faith, they will not get the desired answer."

She highlighted a series of other military drills carried out by the US and South Korea this year and the latter's push to introduce nuclear-powered submarines.

However, Kim Yo-jong said personal relations between her brother and Trump were "still excellent".

▲ *South Korean coverage of Trump's friendliness towards Kim Jong-un*

◀ *An aircraft on approach as a southerly front closes in on Wellington. The city, above, sits on the Cook strait and its airport is flanked by hills, which can make windy conditions even trickier*

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVE ALLAN; MAJA HITIJ/FIFA/GETTY

Flying into Wellington The wild welcome to world's windiest city

Eva Corlett
Wellington

It had been a smooth late-July flight from Auckland, until the plane started its descent into Wellington. Then the bumps and swaying began.

"The more we went down, the rockier it got," says Laura, a Wellington resident who wished to give her first name only.

"There was one point where we must have got a horrible cross-wind and it felt like the plane was about to flip over. At that point, the entire flight screamed. I genuinely felt like I was about to die."

The plane lurched back up into the sky. The pilot announced that the weather was set to worsen and the plane returned to Auckland.

"We often call it a 'Welly welcome' when you get a bumpy landing, but this was a different level of scary," Laura says. "And obviously the pilots knew that, because they didn't land and didn't try to do it again."

Anyone who has frequently flown into New Zealand's capital has a story to tell. Wellington is the world's windiest city, with an annual average wind speed of 18mph. The city sits on the Cook strait, a passage between New Zealand's North and South Islands, making it prone to high winds that can compound around the airport, which is flanked by hills.

This year's "super" El Niño, a label assigned when sea surface temperatures rise by at least 2C, will be the strongest of the century, and that could intensify Wellington's winds as the city heads into spring – the windiest season.

"There were some El Niños in the past where it's ended up being very windy in Wellington … so we expect it to be windier and more westerly than normal," says Dr Richard Turner, a research meteorologist at Earth Sciences. "Those landings are probably going to be a little bit bumpy for the next few months."

For many, the descent can feel akin to sitting in a tiny boat as it's thrown around on an angry sea. It is not uncommon to hear passengers gasping, praying or vomiting. Occasionally the plane might be metres from touchdown before suddenly and rapidly ascending back into the sky to reattempt a landing. When wheels do eventually reach the tarmac and come to a strained halt, the cabin often breaks out in applause.

On particularly bad days local TV crews will wait at the airport, ready to interview passengers looking haunted and pale.

But for more seasoned flyers, the notoriously bumpy ride is all part of the fun. "It's like a rollercoaster, it's a real adrenaline rush," says Kevin Eagles, a Wellingtonian who has carved out an online following by livestreaming the airport's take-offs and landings. "It's well-known you really swirl about, you think about your life a little bit as it comes down, and then you're slammed down on the tarmac and wait for the moment the reverse thrusters kick in and there is a big roar – you're just holding on really."

Videos of choppy flights attract the highest number of views. "You know what it's like for those passengers in there to experience that and you feel empathy for them but at the same time it's incredibly thrilling," Eagles says.

On social media, people frequently relay their experiences flying into Wellington after another bumpy video emerges. "That was me on that plane years ago trying to land like a seagull in a stiff breeze. Hyperventilating into the sick bag, while you could have heard a pin drop," writes one commentator.

> *'We often call a bumpy landing a Welly welcome, but this was a different level of scary'*
>
> **Laura** *A Wellingtonian recalling a recent flight*

Another says: "Best pilots in the world. That bay landing is brutal."

An analysis by Earth Sciences New Zealand shows the airport in Wellington has a higher proportion of strong winds than other parts of the city, owing to its exposed location. Gusts of more than 60mph are relatively frequent there, it says. Turner adds: "There tends to be a funnelling effect through the strait."

Wellington can be windy year-round but spring tends to bring low pressure systems that can intensify gusts. "The storms in the Southern Ocean barrel along and in front of them are these fronts that have these very strong pressure gradients at those times of the year," Turner says.

But Capt Jake Snelgrove, an experienced Air New Zealand pilot, assures passengers that the bumps are always more pronounced towards the back of the plane and that pilots are highly trained to deal with Wellington's wind. "You go in there with a lot of respect for Wellington and what the weather can do … and tend to make early, proactive decisions."

He says no Wellington weather would ever be strong enough to compromise the structural integrity of the plane, and pilots have a warning system that alerts them to wind shear – a sudden change in wind speed or direction.

Where wind shear is present, pilots have a particular manoeuvre for the approach, or will conduct a go-around, to avoid landing. "While it sometimes doesn't feel comfortable, it is still safe," he says.

Eagles adds that on days when Wellington's wind does settle, passengers are in for a remarkable journey. "Your anxiety is replaced by beautiful views … You see the stadium and the harbour sparkling, and you think, wow."

Plea for 'mushroom murders' killer to remain in jail for life

Nino Bucci

The killer behind the "mushroom murders" that shocked Australia should never be released from prison, a court of appeal has heard.

Erin Patterson, 51, is appealing against her convictions, while the director of public prosecutions is appealing against her sentence, arguing it was too lenient.

In September last year, Patterson was sentenced to life imprisonment, with a non-parole period of 33 years, for the murders of her estranged husband's parents, Don and Gail Patterson, and his aunt Heather Wilkinson.

Patterson was also convicted of the attempted murder of Heather's husband, Ian Wilkinson, who survived after she served the group a meal laced with death cap mushrooms.

Brendan Kissane KC, the DPP, said yesterday that even though Patterson would be in her 80s by the time she was eligible for parole, the sentence was "manifestly inadequate".

He said the sentencing judge, Justice Christopher Beale, had erred in finding that Patterson would probably spend "years" in solitary confinement.

When asked by Justice Lesley Taylor whether a longer non-parole period would essentially damn Patterson to dying behind bars, Kissane said: "It has its harsh aspect to it, of course, we accept that.

"But in our submission that is not a matter that is outweighed by the seriousness of the offending."

The DPP appeal is for Patterson to be resentenced without a non-parole period, but if that fails they have asked for a longer non-parole period.

But Richard Edney, for Patterson, said she was in effect being held in solitary confinement, and had been for some time.

He said that Patterson spent 22 to 23 hours a day in a 4-metre by 2-metre cell, and that Beale had correctly identified the need to balance these conditions against the gravity of her offending.

The crown prosecutor Jeremy McWilliams said the grounds for her appeal lacked substance.

He also said there was no evidence she had an "innocent" interest in foraging mushrooms, as claimed, and no witnesses had backed this up.

Justices Lesley Taylor, Stephen McLeish and Peter Kidd reserved their decision on both appeals.

FTSE 100	All share	Dow Indl	Nikkei 225	£/€	£/$
+4.81	-1.39	-405.07	+890.37	1.1668	1.3633
10748.16	5794.50	53057.98	66216.79	0.0000	+0.0024

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

Business

Some experts say that JD Sports needs to move faster to adapt to changing trends
PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS

JD Sports cuts £50m from profit forecast as trainer sales are hit

Kalyeena Makortoff
Sarah Butler

The sports fashion retailer JD Group has cut £50m from its profit forecast as cost-of-living pressures, fuelled by the US war on Iran, weighed on sales of trainers.

JD Sports, which sells brands including Nike and Adidas, said widespread inflation had hit shoppers' wallets, particularly its core young shoppers, resulting in a drop in sales across important markets such as the US, where it struggled to shift trainers and other footwear.

Bosses went on to warn that the wider fall in consumer spending was likely to continue into the second half of the year. The retailer now expects lower pre-tax profits of between £700m and £800m for the full year, having previously hoped to reach £750m to £850m.

The news led to a 14% drop in JD's London-listed shares in trading yesterday, to their lowest level since May.

Régis Schultz, JD's chief executive, said: "Trading in the second quarter remained tough," adding that the company had been forced to cut prices and offer promotions to compensate, as "our core consumer was impacted by incremental cost-of-living pressures". The company, which runs 4,800 stores worldwide including the JD, Blacks and Millets chains in Britain, said pressures included higher fuel prices, which have been pushed up by the US-Israeli war on Iran, which has stopped tankers passing through the strait of Hormuz.

Overall, JD said like-for-like sales fell by 3.1% in the second quarter, with its North America operations taking the biggest hit, down by 6.8%. Sales across Europe were down 2.7%.

The UK was a rare bright spot as World Cup excitement drove sales of football replica kits, while consumers bought more outdoor gear, including from its high street brands Blacks and Go Outdoors.

Chloe Tedford-Jones, apparel analyst at industry research firm GlobalData, said JD's sales performance reflected a maturing sportswear market and problems at its biggest brand, Nike.

"The retailer's performance is heavily impacted by its over-reliance on Nike, which has continued to struggle due to an innovation drought in footwear. While JD Sports now also stocks surging alternative brands like On and Hoka, they lack the volumes required to offset this heritage deficit," she said.

Tedford-Jones said JD needed to move faster to adapt to changing trends, which are shifting towards outdoor gear and performance sports rather than casual "athleisure" clothing.

Disagreements over strategy at the retailer led to the exit of chair Andrew Higginson at JD's annual meeting last month, reportedly after he failed to persuade the board to oust Schultz.

Peter Agnefjäll, the former boss of furniture retailer Ikea Group, is to step in as the new chair next month – making him the group's fourth chair in just over four years.

Boohoo fined €2.3m in France for offering deceptive discounts

Sarah Butler

The British online fashion retailer Boohoo has been fined €2.3m (£2m) by France's consumer watchdog for deceptive practices, such as offering fake discounts.

The Manchester-based brand was found to have exaggerated discounts, giving shoppers a false impression of the savings they were making, according to the directorate general for competition, consumer affairs and fraud control.

Of the promotions examined by the watchdog, 40% were found not to be real price reductions, 7% were a lower reduction than advertised, and 48% were a price increase.

Boohoo also used terms such as "leather" or "suede" to sell synthetic items, contravening French rules on product labelling, the regulator said.

The fine comes four years after Boohoo reached a settlement in a $100m (£73m) US lawsuit that alleged the retailer had used fake promotions to mislead shoppers. The settlement was agreed "without admission of liability", according to Boohoo.

The French fine comes after a rocky few years for the online seller, which has faced rising competition from cut-price rivals such as Shein, Temu and the secondhand site Vinted.

The group has been battling to revive sales after a boom during the Covid pandemic, when high street shops were closed.

Boohoo's brand was also tarnished in 2020 after reports of poor working practices in Leicester factories used by the company were found to be "substantially true" in a damning independent report.

A spokesperson for Boohoo said the discount issues related to a period from October 2023 to February 2024, when the business was under its previous management, and had now been resolved.

"We have cooperated fully with the regulator, and continue to review how we price and label our products," the spokesperson said.

48%

The proportion of promotions that were in fact a price rise for French shoppers, according to regulators

Life sentence for property tycoon who was China's richest man

Amy Hawkins
Senior China correspondent

The founder of Evergrande, one of China's largest property developers, has been sentenced to life in prison.

Hui Ka Yan, once China's richest man with a net worth of $42.5bn (£31.2bn) in 2017, pleaded guilty in April to eight charges.

These included misuse of funds, fundraising fraud, illegally taking public deposits, illegally extending loans, fraudulently issuing securities and bribery.

Evergrande Group was fined 8.8bn yuan (£950m), with its property arm fined 7bn yuan, according to Chinese state media.

Hui's convictions relate to a debt crisis at Evergrande, which shook China at a time when the government had been trying to make the world's second-largest economy less reliant on the real estate sector.

Evergrande, which delisted from the Hong Kong stock exchange last year, has defaulted on most of its $300bn in liabilities.

Shenzhen intermediate people's court in southern China said in its ruling that between 2016 and 2021, Hui "violated state laws by employing methods such as sustained, large-scale financial fraud to inflate assets and conceal liabilities".

Hui's actions "severely disrupted the order of the socialist market economy" and "caused exceptionally heavy economic losses", it added.

More than 50 individuals linked to Evergrande were also sentenced yesterday, with prison terms ranging from 20 months to 18 years.

Evergrande's troubles began in 2020 when the Chinese government introduced regulations limiting the amount of debt that property companies could hold. This torpedoed the debt-fuelled real estate sector, which has traditionally accounted for up to a third of China's GDP.

Construction stalled on hundreds of developments as companies scrambled for cash and struggled to pay suppliers amid weak demand during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hui's company was at the centre of the crisis. Evergrande's implosion has been seen as a symbol for wider troubles in the property sector, which still weighs heavily on China's economy.

Born to a poor family in rural Henan province, Hui set up Evergrande in 1996. In 2018 he thanked the Chinese Communist party for providing "everything that Evergrande and I have".

Specsavers pays £12m dividend to parent firm after jump in earnings

Sarah Butler

Specsavers has paid £12m to its parent company controlled by founders Doug and Dame Mary Perkins after the high street opticians' profits increased by more than a quarter.

Globally, the group operates nearly 3,000 optometry, audiology and ophthalmology businesses, including more than 1,200 in the UK, through hundreds of independent partners.

Specsavers shared out a payment of almost £258m to those independent shop owners, up from £239m in the previous year.

It said it had revived paying a dividend to its Perkins-controlled parent, Specsavers International Healthcare Ltd, after pre-tax profits rose to £429.7m in the year to this February, while sales increased 7% to £4.3bn.

No dividend was paid to the Guernsey-based parent in the previous year, when Specsavers said it had "paused all dividends" as a one-off "due to economic and political uncertainty and their own significant expansion and investment". In the two prior years dividends of about £15m were paid.

Specsavers said sales had risen "as we continue to attract customers to the brand despite a challenging macro-economic landscape". According to the accounts, profits rose as the company had strived to keep costs flat and reduced "non-value-add activities".

It said inflation "will continue to present both challenges and opportunity and our regional plans are constantly being reviewed and updated to respond to changing market forces". The company said it aimed to "absorb inflationary price increases where possible and to avoid passing increased costs on to our customers".

The group faced inflation on wages, utilities and from supplier costs, as well as increasing regulatory pressure. It is also investing in improving its website as customers increasingly want to mix in-store visits with interacting online.

The Perkins, whose combined fortune is calculated at £1.4bn by the Sunday Times rich list, founded Specsavers in 1983. The first stores opened the following year.

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Business view

Nils Pratley

A World Cup, a heatwave, but no hot new designs proved to be JD Sports' undoing this summer

It was a slower quarter for "high-heat footwear product", said JD Sports. It didn't mean it was struggling to shift sandals during a heatwave. Rather, it was referring coyly to the big global trainer brands' failure to come up with hot new designs. When Nike and Adidas, reckoned by City analysts to account for slightly more than half JD's sales, are on tepid form, the self-styled "king of trainers" retailer usually is as well.

The low-heat grumble will be familiar to JD's shareholders. So, too, the one about "incremental cost of living pressures", especially in the US. And the phrase "a promotional market" has appeared so often in the company's updates in the past couple of years that it would be easier to tell us when discounting isn't dominant.

The result was another warning on profits and a 14% slump in the share price. JD now thinks it will make between £700m and £800m at an underlying pre-tax level this financial year. The difference from the previous estimate of £750m to £850m isn't huge, but they all count. This was the third warning since early 2024. The particular disappointment this time is that it was a men's football World Cup year, which ought to have been good for generating a general sporty buzz for a global business.

▲ *JD's fortunes tend to rise and fall with the likes of Nike and Adidas*

The market clearly is genuinely weak. Nike's share price is down a third this year even after a miserable performance in the last two. Or look at Adidas's own recent warning that its big marketing bet on the World Cup didn't pay off. Or at the sluggish spending among US consumers in response to higher energy prices: Walmart, the largest US retailer, this week reported its slowest sales growth in six years.

Even so, the deeper worry at JD is that the whole "athleisure" trend isn't coming back – or, if it does, at nothing like the level of the old days. The Covid pandemic created a mini-boom for joggers and trainers but since then the direction has only been one way. Did Nike and Adidas push prices too far? Have they been outflanked by the likes of Hoka and On? Or have consumer tastes just changed? Probably all of the above to an extent – and none is good news for JD.

The cashflow forecast, of £460m to £520m, didn't change, which is evidence to support JD's boasts about sharpening internal controls after its previous boom years of successful global expansion in the 2010s. All the same, waiting for an upturn, counting the cashflow and buying back a few shares makes for an uninspiring life.

Disagreements about strategy reportedly led to the exit of the chair Andrew Higginson last month, and one can see why there would be tension. The share price is back at 2019 levels.

If this were a conventionally owned public company, as opposed to one with a 55% shareholder in the form of the Pentland Group, the chief executive, Régis Schultz, might be under more pressure to generate some trading heat via self-help. Non-Pentland shareholders are surely frustrated.

▼ *The US staged an intervention with Tokyo to prop up the value of the yen, which had little impact*

PHOTOGRAPH: EUGENE HOSHIKO/AP

Trump turmoil Why US bond market troubles are hitting the wider world

Richard Partington
Senior economics correspondent

Government borrowing costs around the world have surged to the highest levels in decades amid growing fears over US bond market turmoil. Anxiety about Donald Trump's handling of the US economy, and concern that the president's war with Iran is driving up inflation, are triggering a sell-off in the US bond market.

Highlighting the world economy's dependence on US stability, the yield - in effect the interest rate - on UK, French, German and Japanese government debt has been dragged higher. Here we look at the factors driving the bond market and the likely consequences.

What is happening in the bond market sell-off?

Long-term US government borrowing costs have risen to the highest level since 2007, with the 30-year Treasury bond yield trading above 5%. A bond is a form of loan that investors make to a borrower, or bond issuer. The yield represents the money an investor receives for owning the debt as a percentage of its current price. Prices fall when investor demand wobbles, which pushes up yields. Against this backdrop, Scott Bessent the US Treasury secretary, said this week that Washington would at least double its purchases of long-term US bonds in an attempt to assuage investor concerns. Washington also staged a joint intervention this month with Tokyo to prop up the value of the Japanese yen. Bessent's intervention helped to push down yields, but the impact was only temporary: they rose again yesterday.

With US Treasury bonds a lynchpin in global financial markets, the rise in US borrowing costs has dragged yields higher for other countries. G7 nations have faced among the sharpest increases: UK 10-year bond rates are close to the highest since 2008 and 30-year rates are near 1998 levels; Germany's are at 2011 levels and France's are at a 16-year peak. Japanese borrowing costs have also hit the highest level since 1996.

Why are bond investors rushing for the exits?

The breakdown of negotiations in the US-Israel war on Iran is the main trigger for investor unease. The US national debt hitting $40tn (£29.3tn) for the first time - after having doubled over the past decade - is also stoking fear that Trump's tax and spending plans are unsustainable. The stop-start fighting in the Middle East has increased the oil price - fuelling worries over inflation and the hit to economic growth worldwide.

▲ *Donald Trump hosts a summit for crypto and technology leaders as borrowing increases to fund AI*

PHOTOGRAPH: ALEX WONG/GETTY

Inflation is bad news for bond investors. This is because it undercuts the future value of money received for owning the debt; so investors demand a higher yield to compensate for the risk.

In response to the inflation shock, the world's most powerful central banks are expected to raise interest rates. However, the unpredictable nature of the Iran war, and of the Trump administration, are making the challenge tougher. Albert Edwards, a senior analyst at Société Générale, said: "Many also believe US bonds are having a tantrum because new Fed chair Kevin Warsh refuses to spoon-feed investors with the forward guidance they had become accustomed to."

> ***'Many believe bonds are having a tantrum because the new Fed chair [will not] spoon-feed investors'***
>
> **Albert Edwards**
> *Senior analyst*

Investors are also worried by political risk: in the US, the fear is Trump has little appetite to curtail soaring borrowing and debt levels. Investors have asked similar questions of Britain's prime minister, Andy Burnham, and France is preparing for an election in 2027 amid mounting political schisms. Japan also faces challenges as it pumps up government spending despite elevated debt levels and with its currency under pressure.

The AI boom is another factor. Silicon Valley companies are borrowing heavily to fund new datacentres, which means bond investors are being asked to swallow sizable amounts of debt.

What are the consequences?

The impact is far-reaching. Higher yields will push up the costs for consumers and businesses for their mortgages, loans and corporate bonds - reducing their capacity to spend elsewhere.

Governments worldwide, awash with debt, are being squeezed. The rise in interest costs will add to Washington's debt pile, complicating Trump's tax and spending plans, and make life harder elsewhere; including the UK and France before tough budgets.

Some experts warn of a doom loop: whereby higher debt costs crowd out room for governments to spend on growth-enhancing measures - locking in weak economic growth and tax revenues; making budget deficits and rising debt levels more likely.

For the UK chancellor, John Healey, analysts at Société Générale expect the rise in borrowing costs could erase about half of the £23.6bn headroom left in reserve in the spring against the government's self-imposed fiscal rules.

What happens next?

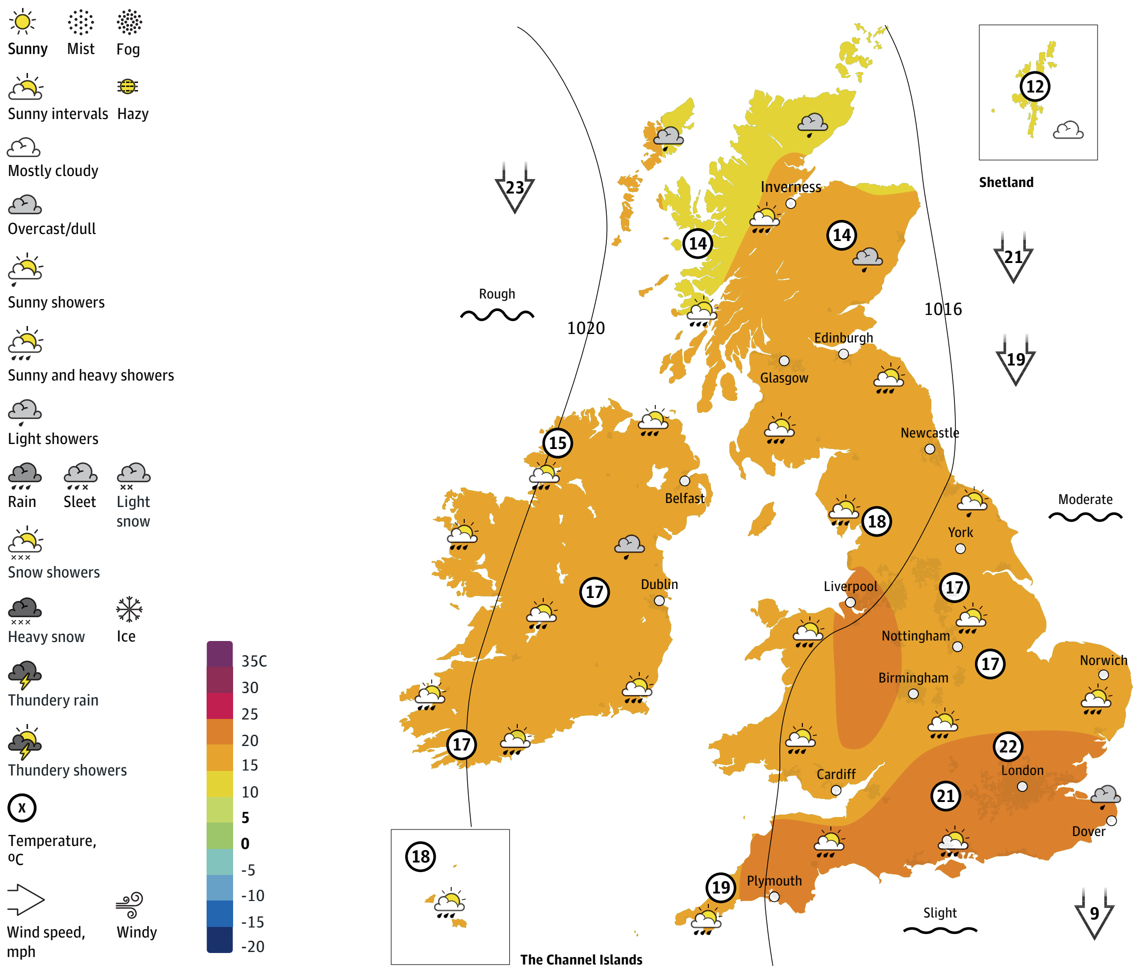
Much will depend on how the Iran war unfolds; and if the Trump administration changes course on tax and spending, or intervenes again in markets to support bond prices. The response from the world's most powerful central banks will also be key.

The US has historically held an "exorbitant privilege" given the US dollar's status as the global reserve currency, ensuring demand for dollar assets and enabling it to run persistently high trade and budget deficits. However, some analysts warn that the Trump administration is putting this at risk. The uncertainty comes as pressure is likely to mount on Trump before the midterm elections in November. Most investors will be looking for any easing in geopolitical tensions, further market intervention, or a shift in tax and spending policy from Washington. Central banks' reassurance could also help.

However, some analysts warn that the ingredients are there for a market accident. Edwards said the conditions could be coming together for a US financial crisis.

Weather
Friday 21 August 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today


Sunny
Mist
Fog
Sunny intervals
Hazy
Mostly cloudy
Overcast/dull
Sunny showers
Sunny and heavy showers
Light showers
Rain
Sleet
Light snow
Snow showers
Heavy snow
Ice
Thundery rain
Thundery showers
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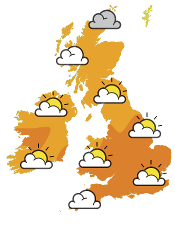
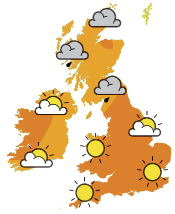
The Channel Islands

Forecast

Low 8 High 19
Tomorrow



Low 8 High 20
Sunday



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO₂ readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

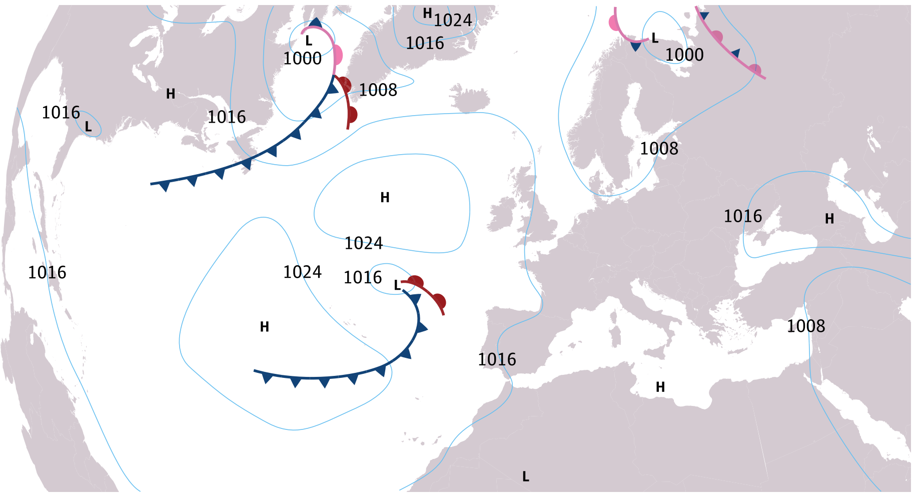
Latest	
14 Aug 2026	427.80
Weekly average	
09 Aug 2026	427.59
20 Aug 2025	425.53
20 Aug 2016	403.08
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
London	11 22	60%	Low
Manchester	8 18	65%	Low
Edinburgh	7 17	15%	Low
Belfast	10 16	55%	Low
Birmingham	8 19	65%	Low
Brighton	10 19	55%	Low
Bristol	11 19	55%	Low
Cardiff	10 18	65%	Low
Newcastle	7 16	55%	Low
Penzance	14 18	60%	Low

Atlantic front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Cold front
Warm front
Occluded front
Trough

High tides

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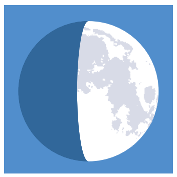
Aberdeen	**0723**	3.3m	**1953**	3.3m
Avonmouth	**--**	--	**1216**	9.7m
Barrow	**0455**	6.9m	**1733**	6.8m
Belfast	**0450**	3.0m	**1723**	2.9m
Cobh	**1103**	3.2m	**2331**	3.1m
Cromer	**--**	--	**1244**	3.8m
Dover	**0448**	5.3m	**1712**	5.3m
Dublin	**0544**	3.2m	**1813**	3.2m
Galway	**1101**	3.9m	**2335**	3.6m
Greenock	**0530**	3.0m	**1815**	2.8m
Harwich	**0501**	3.3m	**1732**	3.3m
Holyhead	**0356**	4.3m	**1637**	4.3m
Hull	**--**	--	**1140**	5.7m
Leith	**0840**	4.3m	**2100**	4.3m
Liverpool	**0434**	7.3m	**1712**	7.2m
London Bridge	**0708**	5.8m	**1941**	5.8m
Lossiemouth	**0531**	3.1m	**1758**	3.1m
Milford Haven	**--**	--	**1148**	5.2m
Newquay	**1046**	4.9m	**2320**	4.7m
North Shields	**0925**	3.9m	**2157**	3.8m
Oban	**1117**	2.8m	**2319**	2.7m
Penzance	**1027**	4.2m	**2303**	4.0m
Plymouth	**1054**	4.3m	**2312**	4.1m
Portsmouth	**0501**	3.7m	**1720**	3.8m
Southport	**0347**	7.0m	**1618**	6.9m
Stornoway	**0059**	3.4m	**1348**	3.5m
Portland	**1131**	1.4m	**2351**	1.2m
Whitby	**0953**	4.3m	**2225**	4.3m
Wick	**0504**	2.6m	**1732**	2.6m
Workington	**0459**	6.3m	**1740**	6.2m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0555
Sun sets	2010
Moon rises	1640
Moon sets	2320
Full Moon	28 Aug

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2043 to 0613
Birm'ham	2020 to 0601
Brighton	2009 to 0559
Bristol	2021 to 0608
Carlisle	2031 to 0559
Cork	2045 to 0630
Dublin	2040 to 0617
Glasgow	2040 to 0603
Harlech	2030 to 0610
Inverness	2044 to 0556
London	2010 to 0556
M'chester	2024 to 0601
Newcastle	2026 to 0554
Norwich	2008 to 0549
Penzance	2029 to 0622

Pollutionwatch

Cutting carbon emissions is normally framed as having a global benefit, but studies published in 2025 and 2026 from Greece add to the growing evidence that cutting coal use and air pollution can provide immediate health benefits to local communities.

Through the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st, West Macedonia became Europe's leading area for lignite mining. Much of this poor-quality coal was burned in its six power stations.

Following the closure of mines and the clean-up and closure of power stations the study authors concluded: "When the air cleared, fewer patients filled the cardiac wards. This regional transition serves as a microcosm of what can be achieved globally through sustained emission reductions."

Cuts in air pollution from 2011 to 2021 were accompanied by a big fall in hospital admissions for heart problems – wintertime admissions fell by between 22% and 42%. This contrasts with an increase of about 2% in a hospital serving a rural area 30 to 60 miles away. The proportion of people with heart attacks and severe heart rhythm problems also fell, dropping to one third of 2011 levels in one of the study hospitals.

Gary Fuller

Around the world

Algiers	32
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Basra	46
Beijing	33
Berlin	25
Bermuda	31
Brussels	19
Budapest	34
C'hagen	20
Cairo	35
Cape Town	21
Chicago	27
Corfu	34
Dakar	32
Dhaka	32
Dublin	17
Florence	28
Gibraltar	29
H Kong	31
Harare	25
Helsinki	20
Istanbul	30
Jo'burg	24
K Lumpur	34
K'mandu	28
Kabul	33
Kingston	34
Kolkata	33
L Angeles	32
Lagos	28
Lima	23
Lisbon	25
Madrid	31
Malaga	33
Melb'rne	15
Mexico C	25
Miami	34
Milan	23
Mombasa	30
Moscow	22
Mumbai	31
N Orleans	36
Nairobi	26
New Delhi	34
New York	26
Oslo	20
Paris	22
Perth	22
Prague	23
Reykjavik	12
Rio de J	26
Rome	30
Shanghai	31
Singapore	33
Stockh'm	17
Strasb'g	21
Sydney	22
Tel Aviv	32
Tenerife	30
Tokyo	31
Toronto	25
Vancouv'r	25
Vienna	27
Warsaw	25
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Well'ton	14
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Cycling

Tour of Britain rider almost hit by non-race car

Page 37 →

Football

Jaissle wants fans to share his trust in young squad

Page 41 →

Sport

Tennis

Is Sabalenka's latest loss cause for concern as she fights for form?

World No 1's hold on the top spot is slipping – and the manner of two-set defeat by Bejlek raises eyebrows

Tumaini Carayol
Cincinnati

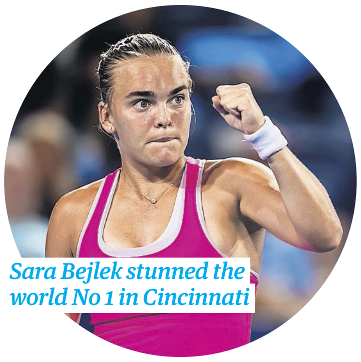
▲ *Aryna Sabalenka has lost seven of her last 24 matches this season*
ROBERT PRANGE/GETTY IMAGES

Towards the end of a messy first set tie-break late on Wednesday, Aryna Sabalenka wildly sprayed another painfully nervous backhand before slamming her racket to the ground. As the racket connected with the acrylic floor, its vibration dampener detached from the strings and rolled off in the direction of the broadcast camera pit by the side of the court.

With the diminutive 20-year-old Czech player Sara Bejlek leading Sabalenka 6-5 in the tie-break, this slapstick sequence forced play to pause while the Belarusian and a couple of volunteers comically searched for the missing vibration damper underneath the cameras until she gave up and retrieved a new one. A few minutes later, Sabalenka trailed by a set.

Nothing in the world seemed to fall in the world No 1's favour at the Cincinnati Open as Sabalenka was toppled 7-6 (7), 6-4 by Bejlek around midnight, and it has been some time since anything did. On this occasion, Sabalenka sprayed errors, she moved sluggishly and failed to maintain her composure throughout her time on the court.

Bejlek is a cunning lefty capable of narrowing the court with her excellent defensive skills and keeping opponents guessing by intelligently mixing up the spin and trajectory in her strokes. Still, Sabalenka's mental collapse in both sets made for a shocking sight. After leading 5-1 in the first set tie-break and losing five points in a row, Sabalenka led 4-1 in the second set before conceding the final five games of the match.



Sara Bejlek stunned the world No 1 in Cincinnati

Nothing about the way the world No 1 started her 2026 season hinted at the struggles to come. Sabalenka won 26 of her first 27 matches of the season; her painful defeat in the Australian Open final to Elena Rybakina was counterbalanced by a remarkable achievement in March as she won the Sunshine Double, consecutively triumphing at Indian Wells and Miami.

Even at the height of her powers, Sabalenka has had plenty of mental demons to battle. However, most of those difficulties have been confined to grand slam finals or semi-finals, the most consequential and pressure-filled matches. Otherwise, this period of Sabalenka's career has been underscored by her toughness, composure and how often she finds a way through.

After Miami, Sabalenka's level abruptly collapsed. She is 17-7 in wins and losses since the start of April, having reached one semi-final and zero finals in her past seven tournaments. Some of these losses have been absolutely shocking, particularly her total collapse against Diana Shnaider in the quarter-finals at the French Open, where she led 6-3, 4-1 with a double break before losing 12 of the subsequent 13 games.

As a result of these struggles, the No 1 ranking will surely fall. Sabalenka's fourth-round loss in Cincinnati meant Rybakina, the current Australian Open and WTA Finals champion, has narrowed the gap to just 434 points as of yesterday.

While Sabalenka will have 2,000 points to defend at the US Open as the defending champion, Rybakina reached only the fourth round last year. Her own form had briefly faltered earlier in the summer, but Rybakina, a finalist last week in Toronto, is playing well again at just the right time. It would take another title from Sabalenka in New York and a few catastrophic results from Rybakina for her to miss the boat.

There are times when such drastic form shifts are often tied to injuries or off-court turmoil, but Sabalenka has remained healthy this year and, from what she has publicly shared, she does not appear to be enduring any significant personal issues away from the court.

Before her loss, Sabalenka tried to project a positive mindset as she addressed her recent difficulties: "I feel like time flies faster and faster the older I get," she said, smiling. "It's crazy. I would say that I'm super-happy with the beginning of the season. Then I went a bit down the hill, but I feel like I'm building myself back and I feel like I had a lot of great matches, a lot of great wins, a lot of tough lessons, but it's also my journey and I only get better from that."

> ***The all-time greats made sustained dominance look so easy – but legends are total outliers***

Her recent form merely stands as a reminder of how difficult it is to remain on top for a lengthy period. When things start to go wrong, the gruelling, relentless nature of this sport means there are few opportunities for players to regroup until the end of the season. Meanwhile, the great depth of the modern game ensures there will always be quality players ready to pick off a vulnerable top player.

In recent years, the achievements of all-time greats such as Serena Williams, Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal have made sustained dominance look so easy. These legends are total outliers in the history of the sport. Sometimes, great players just reach their mental or physical limits, and they quickly find themselves down the hill again, unable to summon the same intensity, toughness and quality that came so naturally before. Their responses to such difficult periods usually reveal plenty about them. How Sabalenka manages herself after a few challenging months is what will define the next stage of her career.

Alcaraz to play at US Open

Carlos Alcaraz has won his battle to be fit for the US Open. The seven-time grand slam champion has not played on the ATP Tour since April due to a wrist issue. The injury forced Alcaraz to miss the defence of his French Open title and Wimbledon before he pulled out of the Cincinnati Open at the start of this month, but the 23-year-old will step back on to the court at Flushing Meadows later this month.

The US Open has announced another large increase in prize money for the tournament that starts on Sunday and finishes on 13 September. An overall prize fund of $108m (£80m) is the biggest in the sport's history and represents a 20% rise for the second consecutive year. The winners of the singles will receive $5.5m, while first-round prize money has been increased to more than £100,000.

Tournament organisers will hope they have done enough to stave off the type of player protests that took place at the French Open and Wimbledon. A group of leading players, including both world No 1s, Jannik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka, has been engaged in a battle with the major tournaments, called Project RedEye, for the past 18 months regarding levels of prize money and various other complaints.

Along with the prize money announcement from New York, the grand slam confirmed the introduction of a grand slam player advisory council. One of the players' chief complaints has been the lack of a meaningful say in decision-making and the slams said the new council would serve as "the forum for direct communication, feedback and collaboration between the grand slams and players".

The body will launch after the US Open. It will also be the forum for discussions about contributions to player welfare. Agencies

Cricket *County Championship*

Thomas and Nicholls give Somerset title hopes a boost

Tanya Aldred
Derby

◀ *Somerset's Josh Thomas salutes the crowd at Taunton after making 110*
HARRY TRUMP/GETTY IMAGES

After weeks of drought, the rain arrived across the country, like a tolling bell, just in time for the County Championship restart.

Josh Thomas hit the only century of the day on a bonny day for title-chasing **Somerset**. Thomas's sprightly second first-class hundred, together with 96 on debut from New Zealand's Henry Nicholls, left Taunton merry after the hosts were inserted by **Essex** on a surface friendlier than it looked.

England's forgotten man Zak Crawley gambolled to his highest score of the season as **Kent** rattled along against **Middlesex** on the corn-coloured grassland of Merchant Taylor's school. Crawley played with discipline and flair before wafting Ryan Higgins to second slip for 81. Sam Northeast collected 87 against his favourite opposition. The excellent Toby Roland-Jones grabbed three wickets.

Liam Patterson-White saved **Nottinghamshire**'s bacon with 76 not out in the battle of the big dogs at the Oval. **Surrey**, lying in an unfamiliar seventh place, had reduced Notts to 104 for eight. Tom Lawes grabbed five wickets.

Fourteen wickets fell in the relegation ding-dong at Southampton. Kyle Abbot's four for 17 felled **Yorkshire**, who limped to 173 courtesy of an unbeaten 40 from Dom Bess. George Hill then returned the favour with three for four to leave **Hampshire** 60 for four.

Durham have the upper hand in the Division Two promotion race, but didn't get much chance to show their wares on a day of thunder, rain and bad light against **Derbyshire**. Alex Lees nurdled his way to an unbeaten fifty in front of some doughty spectators.

On the parched grass of Cheltenham, **Worcestershire**'s Ben Allison whistled up three quick **Gloucestershire** wickets. There was just time for Tommy Boorman, 21, to reach his first championship fifty in the town where he was born before the heavens opened.

Warwickshire and **Sussex** eyed each other warily over the Edgbaston covers, the visitors inching to 99 for three. An overnight hosing left Old Trafford saturated and only 18 overs possible between **Lancashire** and **Northamptonshire**, while at Grace Road **Glamorgan**'s bowlers picked apart **Leicestershire**, leaving them 113 for seven.

Sport In brief

Athletics

Coach Baptiste in Marrakech prison

Leon Baptiste, the British Athletics coach who had not been heard from since visiting Morocco two months ago, is being held in prison in Marrakech. The 41-year-old, who coaches a number of elite athletes, is believed to have gone to Morocco for the weekend with friends. As of last weekend he had not been heard from since by his athletes or the UK Athletics officials who pay him as a Loughborough-based consultant, with messages to his phone not returned. A source from the Moroccan ministry of justice said: "According to the information available to the Moroccan authorities, Mr Baptiste did not disappear, nor had he lost contact with his surroundings. He is currently being held at the local prison in Marrakech, where he is serving a custodial sentence following his conviction by the competent judicial authorities in connection with a misdemeanour case." A UK Foreign Office spokesperson told the BBC: "We are supporting a British national who is detained in Morocco and are in contact with the authorities." **Staff**

Racing

Kalpana knuckles down in Yorkshire Oaks

Andrew Balding and Colin Keane combined to land the feature race for the second day running at York's Ebor Festival as Kalpana, the King George winner, bravely held the late challenge of the outsider Sparan Nua by a short head in the Yorkshire Oaks. Sugar Island, a 100-1 outsider, galloped into a 20-length lead in the early stages of the 12-furlong contest and was still a long way clear of her pursuers at the top of the home straight. Keane and Kalpana were first from the pack to challenge as Sugar Island's stride began to shorten a quarter of a mile out and they hit the front just over a furlong from home, but the effort started to tell as Sparan Nua (25-1) and Rossa Ryan finished strongly. Jim Bolger's filly was in front a stride after the line, but a short-head shy where it mattered. Balding, Keane and the Juddmonte bloodstock operation took Tuesday's International Stakes at York with Item. **Greg Wood**

Results and cricket scoreboard

Football

UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE

Playoff round: First leg Benfica L AGF L; Besiktas 3 Kauno Zalgris 0; Egnatia Rrogozhine 0 Lillestrøm 0; Jagiellonia Bialystok 4 Iberia 1999 0; Kairat 0 Anderlecht 3; Lech Poznan 7 Thun 0; Mjällby 0 RB Salzburg 1; OFI L CSKA Sofia L; Red Star Belgrade L Vikrotia Plzen L; Sint-Truiden L Omonia Nicosia L; Trabzonspor 0 Ferencvaros 1; Universitatea Craiova 1 Ararat-Armenia 1

UEFA CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Playoff round:First leg

Gent	(-) **L**	**Hibernian**	(-) **L**
Hearts	(-) **L**	**Rapid Vienna**	(-) **L**
Lincoln Red Imps	(0) **0**	**Larne** O'Neill 84 O'Hara 90+3	(0) **2**
Motherwell	(-) **L**	**Freiburg**	(-) **L**
Rangers	(-) **L**	**Jablonec**	(-) **L**
Shamrock Rovers	(-) **L**	**KuPS**	(-) **L**
Tromsø	(0) **0**	**Brighton**	(0) **0**

Atalanta L Hapoel Tel Aviv L; Braga L Austria Wien L; Dinamo City L Pafos L; Drita L Inter Club d'Escaldes L; Gornik Zabrze L Monaco L; Inter Turku 0 FC Copenhagen 0; KÍ L Riga L; Getafe L Partizan L; Hajduk Split L Rakow Czestochowa L; Lugano L Maccabi Tel Aviv L; Midtjylland 2 Rijeka 0; Nordsjælland 1 St Gallen 0; Panathinaikos L Hradec Kralove L; Paok L Brann L; Sion L Ajax L; Twente L Qarabag L; Víkingur Reykjavík L Borac Banja Luka L

SKY BET LEAGUE ONE

Sheffield Wed	(-) **L**	**Bradford City**	(-) **L**

LA LIGA

Rayo Vallecano L Alavés L

Cricket

ROTHESAY COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP

Division One (first day of four)

Hampshire v Yorkshire

Utilita Bowl Hampshire (3pts) trail Yorkshire (1) by 113 runs with six first-innings wickets remaining.

Yorkshire First innings

A Lyth lbw b Jack	**7**
WA Luxton lbw b Abbott	**2**
SM Whiteman c Brown b Abbott	**0**
JH Wharton b Neal	**24**
ML Revis lbw b Abbott	**33**
***†JM Bairstow** lbw b Abbott	**5**
GCH Hill c & b Neal	**3**
DM Bess not out	**40**
BO Coad c Brown b Jack	**21**
JA Chohan lbw b Neal	**5**
BM Cliff c Lehmann b Baker	**16**
Extras (b4, lb7, w6)	**17**
Total (61 overs)	**173**

Fall 5, 9, 9, 64, 76, 76, 83, 111, 120.

Bowling Abbott 18-10-17-4; Baker 12-2-41-1; Jack 10-0-52-2; Neal 20-3-50-3; Organ 1-0-2-0.

Hampshire first innings

AGH Orr c Bairstow b Coad	**12**
NRT Gubbins not out	**30**
TE Albert b Hill	**14**
JS Lehmann lbw b Hill	**2**
S Baker lbw b Hill	**0**
TJ Prest not out	**2**
Extras	**0**
Total (for 4, 26 overs)	**60**

Fall 26, 42, 48, 50. **To bat** *†BC Brown, FS Organ, AJ Neal, KJ Abbott, EV Jack. **Bowling** Coad 7-2-16-1; Cliff 4-0-15-0; Hill 8-4-4-3; Bess 4-0-15-0; Chohan 3-0-10-0.

Toss Yorkshire elected to bat.

Umpires JD Shantry and RJ Warren.

Leicestershire Glamorgan

Grace Road Leicestershire (0pts) lead Glamorgan (2) by 113 runs with three first-innigs wickets remaining.

Leicestershire first innings

RK Patel c Tribe b Ul-Hassan	**19**
SSE Gumbs run out (Kellaway)	**22**
R Ahmed c Carlson b Toole	**3**
H Shaikh c Cooke b Kellaway	**5**
NF Kelly c Cooke b Van der Gugten	**16**
†JA Tattersall lbw b Gorvin	**15**
***IG Holland** not out	**17**
BWM Mike c Cooke b Van der Gugten	**4**
Extras (b6, lb4, nb2)	**12**
Total (for 7, 46 overs)	**113**

Fall 35, 38, 53, 63, 72, 102, 113.

To bat TAR Scriven, AY Patel, JO Hull.

Bowling Van der Gugten 17-5-43-2; Toole 12-6-23-1; Ul-Hassan 8-1-24-1; Gorvin 7-2-13-1; Kellaway 2-2-0-1.

Glamorgan AM Tribe, *KS Carlson, BI Kellaway, CA Ingram, SR Dickson, †CB Cooke, T van der Gugten, Z Ul-Hassan, MS Crane, AW Gorvin, RL Toole.

Toss Glamorgan elected to field.

Umpires M Burns and BJ Debenham.

Somerset v Essex

Taunton Somerset (2pts) lead Essex (1) by 348 run with five first-innings wickets remaining.

Somerset First innings

JF Thomas b Snater	**110**
TA Lammonby b Cook	**20**
LP Goldsworthy c Pepper b Porter	**16**
HM Nicholls b Cook	**96**
TB Abell b Snater	**65**
†JEK Rew not out	**21**
JT Ball not out	**0**
Extras (b4, lb14, nb2)	**20**
Total (for 5, 96 overs)	**348**

Fall 34, 94, 213, 312, 348. **To bat** AM Vaughan, *L Gregory, M Pretorius, MJ Leach. **Bowling** Porter 20-6-46-1; Cook 20-3-77-2; Snater 19-4-68-2; Harmer 25-4-88-0; Thain 2-0-12-0; Critchley 9-1-37-0; Westley 1-0-2-0.

Essex D Elgar, PI Walter, *T Westley, CWJ Allison, MJJ Critchley, †MKS Pepper, NRM Thain, SR Harmer, S Snater, SJ Cook, JA Porter.

Toss Essex elected to field.

Umpires ID Blackwell and MJ Saggers.

▲ *Marcus Kinhult has the first-round lead at the Nexo Championship*

Surrey v Nottinghamshire

The Oval Surrey (3pts) trail Nottinghamshire (0) by 171 runs with nine first-innings wickets remaining.

Nottinghamshire First innings

***H Hameed** c Pope b Fisher	**5**
BT Slater c Pope b Worrall	**4**
FW McCann c Fisher b Lawes	**10**
JM Clarke c Sibley b Fisher	**1**
JA Haynes c Pope b Lawes	**20**
†K Verreynne c Thomas b Lawes	**22**
BJR Martindale c Foakes b Clark	**13**
LA Patterson-White not out	**76**
OP Stone c Lawes b Worrall	**3**
BA Hutton c Pope b Lawes	**19**
DY Pennington c Foakes b Lawes	**9**
Extras (lb2)	**2**
Total (68 overs)	**184**

Fall 5, 9, 14, 30, 41, 70, 98, 104, 160.

Bowling Worrall 17-4-41-2; Fisher 19-6-43-2; Clark 15-3-53-1; Lawes 17-6-45-5.

Surrey First innings

***RJ Burns** not out	**6**
DP Sibley c Verreynne b Stone	**0**
MD Fisher not out	**7**
Extras	**0**
Total (for 1, 9 overs)	**13**

Fall 0. **To bat** OJD Pope, †BT Foakes, MK Lomror, J Clark, ARG Thomas, TE Lawes, DJ Worrall, JW Blake, RS Patel.

Bowling Hutton 5-2-10-0; Stone 4-3-3-1.

Toss Surrey elected to field.

Umpires MA Gough and PR Pollard.

Warwickshire v Sussex

Edgbaston Sussex (0pts) lead Warwickshire (1) by 99 runs withseven first-innings wickets remaining.

Sussex First innings

DP Hughes c Barnard b Woakes	**11**
***TJ Haines** c Yates b Booth	**49**
TGR Clark lbw b Booth	**30**
CJ Tear not out	**2**
JM Coles not out	**1**
Extras (lb1, w5)	**6**
Total (for 3, 30.3 overs)	**99**

Fall 21, 90, 98. **To bat** †JA Simpson, FJ Hudson-Prentice, JJ Carson, HT Crocombe, SF Hunt, JD Unadkat.

Bowling Bamber 10.3-4-30-0; Woakes 6-1-31-1; Hannon-Dalby 6-2-15-0; Barnard 5-0-17-0; Booth 3-0-5-2.

Warwickshire *RM Yates, ZUA Malik, WA Young, DR Mousley, EG Barnard, VL Jani, †AL Davies, CR Woakes, MG Booth, ER Bamber, OJ Hannon-Dalby.

Toss Warwickshire elected to field.

Umpires N Pratt and RA White.

Division Two (first day of four)

Derbyshire v Durham

Derby Durham (0pts) led Derbyshire (0) by 102 runs with eight first-innngs wickets remaining.

Durham First innings

***AZ Lees** not out	**53**
BS McKinney c Guest b Aitchison	**8**
WMH Rhodes c Aitchison b Randell	**23**
DG Bedingham not out	**14**
Extras (b2, lb1, w1)	**4**
Total (for 2, 38 overs)	**102**

Fall 17, 78. **To bat** G Clark, BA Stokes, †OG Robinson, D Olivier, BA Carse, MJ Potts, CF Parkinson.

Bowling Aitchison 12-2-27-1; Randell 11-1-25-1; Dal 5-1-15-0; Potts 4-1-12-0; Bashir 2-0-3-0; Andersson 4-0-17-0.

Derbyshire HRC Came, CP Jewell, M Montgomery, *WL Madsen, †BD Guest, MK Andersson, AK Dal, BW Aitchison, NJ Potts, S Bashir, BG Randell.

Toss Derbyshire elected to field.

Umpires H Adnan and DJ Millns.

Gloucestershire v Worcestershire

Cheltenham Gloucestershire (0pts) lead Worcestershire (1) by 107 runs with five first-innings wicketsremaining.

Gloucestershire First innings

***CT Bancroft** c Roderick b Allison	**9**
JP Phillips b Waite	**9**
OJ Price b Waite	**31**
MAH Hammond c Hose b Allison	**1**
†JR Bracey c Libby b Allison	**0**
TW Boorman not out	**51**
DJ Ahmed not out	**4**
Extras (lb2)	**2**
Total (for 5, 43 overs)	**107**

Fall 11, 27, 28, 28, 103.

To bat EWO Middleton, AA Rao, WSA Williams, RS Kishore.

Bowling Taylor 13-5-32-0; Allison 14-9-15-3; Waite 7-0-25-2; Swanepoel 6-1-25-0; Landa 3-0-8-0.

Worcestershire JD Libby, DH Lategan, †GH Roderick, AJ Hose, *BL D'Oliveira, HJ Cullen, MJ Waite, TAI Taylor, B Swanepoel, BMJ Allison, F Singh, RM Edavalath.

Toss Gloucestershire elected to bat.

Umpires BJ Peverall and AG Wharf.

Lancashire v Northamptonshire

Old Trafford Northamptonshire (0pts) lead Lancashire (0) by 56 runs with eight first-innings wickets remaining.

Northamptonshire First innings

RS Vasconcelos lbw b Balderson	**13**
***LA Procter** not out	**26**
CG Harrison c Bohannon b Walkden	**1**
NA McSweeney not out	**0**
Extras (b11, nb4, w1)	**16**
Total (for 2, 18 overs)	**56**

Fall 41, 56. **To bat** SA Zaib, JJG Sales, GA Bartlett, †LD McManus, LCJ Guthrie, BW Sanderson, YS Chahal.

Bowling Bailey 5-0-26-0; Stanley 6-2-9-0; Balderson 4-2-2-1; Walkden 3-2-8-1.

Lancashire KK Jennings, MS Harris, *JJ Bohannon, AR Shetty, R Flintoff, †JHA Moores, GP Balderson, TE Bailey, BL Walkden, Noman Ali, MT Stanley.

Toss Lancashire elected to field.

Umpires N Ashraf and CM Watts.

Middlesex v Kent

Northwood Kent (1pt) lead Middlesex (2) by 299 runs with four first-innings wickets remaining.

Kent First innings

BG Compton lbw b Helm	**13**
Z Crawley c Helm b Higgins	**81**
SA Northeast lbw b Roland-Jones	**87**
TS Muyeye c Robson b Roland-Jones	**13**
***DJ Bell-Drummond** c Cracknell b Roland-Jones	**8**
†CG Benjamin b Helm	**27**
E Singh not out	**4**
KJ Dudgeon not out	**13**
Extras (b19, lb24, nb10)	**53**
Total (for 6, 76 overs)	**299**

Fall 25, 167, 185, 219, 274, 278.

To bat ME Milnes, MR Quinn, MW Parkinson.

Bowling Roland-Jones 23-4-70-3; Helm 20-7-57-2; Bosch 10-1-61-0; Higgins 18-2-55-1; Khan 5-1-13-0.

Middlesex SD Robson, LBK Hollman, MDE Holden, *JL du Plooy, BBA Geddes, RF Higgins, †JB Cracknell, Zafar Gohar, E Bosch, TS Roland-Jones, TG Helm.

Toss Kent elected to bat.

Umpires M Newell and S Shanmugam.

Golf

NEXO CHAMPIONSHIP (Aberdeen)

Leading first-round scores (GB/Ire unless stated)
67 M Kinhult (Swe). **69** E Baker; B Follett-Smith (Zim); A Wilson; F Mory (Fr). **70** S Jamieson; A Bergström (Swe); K Nakajima (Jpn); L Bjerregaard (Den); J Scrivener (Aus); H McCullen; J Skov Olesen (Den); M Southgate.
71 A Sullivan; Q Vidal (Sp);C Charmasson (Fr); A Halvorsen (Nor); D van Tonder (SA); M Manassero (It); R Mansell.
72 R Daly (US); E López Chacarra (Sp); C Jarvis (SA); S Norris (SA); K Aphibarnrat (Tha); A Quirós (Sp); R Sterne (SA); Lee K-h (Kor); A Otaegui (UAE); S Forsström (Swe); M Jordan; P Reed (US); G Forrest; M Couvra (Fr); J Rebula (SA); N Nørgaard (Den); A Levy (Fr).

Cycling

TOUR OF BRITAIN WOMEN

Stage two (Clitheroe - Blackpool; 110.5km) **1** L Wiebes (Neth) SD Worx-Protime 3hr 29min 26sec; **2** M Coles-Lyster (Can) Human Powered Health; **3** K Le Court (Mau) AG Insurance-Soudal; **4** N Veenhoven (Neth) Visma Lease a Bike; **5** L Gillespie (Ire) UAE Team L'IMAD; **6** C Consonni (It) Canyon/SRAM all same time.

General classification after stage two: 1 L Wiebes (Neth) SD Worx-Protime 7hr 32min 15sec; **2** C Consonni (It) Canyon/SRAM +0:14; **3** K Le Court (Mau) AG Insurance-Soudal s/t;**4** K Swinkels (Neth) UAE Team L'IMAD +0:15; **5** J Nelson (GB) Picnic PostNL +0:16; **6** M Bredewold (Neth) SD Worx-Protime +0:17.

Greg Wood's racing tips

York 1.50 Blue Courvoisier **2.25** Caballo De Mar **3.00** Agamemnon (nap) **3.35** American Affair (nb) **4.10** Master Builder **4.45** Speyside **5.20** Silver Lake

Newmarket 2.00 Beguiled **2.35** Majestic Jude **3.10** Zighy **3.45** Port Darwin **4.20** Patrol **4.51** Hilltop

Ffos Las 2.10 Sixtygeesbaby **2.45** Oviedo **3.20** Korbut **3.55** Diamond Ali **4.30** Lapidarist **5.02** Atalanta Mist

Hamilton 4.33 Pikachu **5.07** Saxon Grace **5.40** Lord D'Or **6.15** Noble Horizon **6.45** Oriental Prince **7.15** Sir Garfield **7.45** Miraculous **8.15** King Of The Jungle

Salisbury 5.27 Thiscouldbefun **5.57** Spirit Of Lyra **6.27** Bintola **6.57** Violet Goldsmith **7.27** Bintward **7.57** Moab

Fixtures

Football
Premier League
Arsenal v Coventry (8pm)
Emirates FA Cup
Preliminary round Hungerford v Wokingham (7.45pm); Livers edge v Ossett Utd (7.45pm); Redcar v Bridlington (7.45pm); Woodbridge v Felixstowe & Walton (7.45pm)
William Hill Scottish Championship
Inverness CT v Partick (7.30pm)
Rugby league
Betfred Super League
Leigh v Bradford (8pm); Wigan v Wakefield (8pm)

Cycling *Lloyds Tour of Britain Women*

Plouffe nearly hit by car in echo of Tarling's death

The Australian rider Maeve Plouffe has said she was nearly hit by a non-race car during the opening stage of the Tour of Britain Women.

With cycling still coming to terms with the death at the Volta a Portugal of the 19-year-old British rider Finlay Tarling, killed last week in a collision with a vehicle that had entered the course, Plouffe said the incident occurred as she was chasing the peloton after a puncture on Wednesday.

"While the race convoy was still in sight, and I was less than two minutes down, there were cars from the general public coming at me from all directions, including one that nearly hit me on a roundabout," said the 27-year-old.

"Later on, the moto escort was wonderful and I felt much safer. But considering the recent devastating events in our cycling community, it's scary to see situations like this, when we know that this can have horrific consequences, especially so soon after suffering such a tragedy."

Jonathan Day, the events director of British Cycling Ventures – which organises the Tour of Britain Women – issued a statement to the BBC. "We note Maeve Plouffe's comments about her experience during Wednesday's race, and we're taking these extremely seriously," it read. "Rider safety is paramount and will always be treated as a priority in our planning and how we operate any race.

▲ *The peloton rides in torrential rain on the road to Blackpool*

"We're reviewing what happened with Maeve and her team O'Shea Red Chilli Bikes with the seriousness and empathy these comments demand."

Lorena Wiebes sprinted to victory on a rain-affected second stage yesterday, after the race was neutralised for nearly an hour following an unrelated road traffic accident ahead of the peloton. The Dutch rider also won the opening stage of the race.

Meanwhile Josh Tarling, the older brother of Finlay, will ride in the Vuelta a España, which begins tomorrow. The 22-year-old, who also rode in the Tour de France this summer, was confirmed as a member of the team by Netcompany-Ineos yesterday.

His mother, Dawn, posted on Instagram: "He has chosen to do so in honour of his brother Fin, with the full support of his family, surrounded by a team who have been incredibly supportive of whatever decision he made. I could not have wished for two boys who were closer growing up and into adulthood we have watched with pride as Joshua has been the most loving and supportive big brother to Fin. Following this devastating news he has been an incredible strength for us all.

"Finlay was so incredibly proud of his big brother, and would be watching nose to the TV and shouting as he competed. So it is right that Josh honours that love and pride by doing what Fin always loved watching him do." **Guardian sport**

Formula One

Verstappen to stay at Red Bull

Continued *from back page*

set, Mercedes have emerged with a dominant car. Verstappen is sixth in the world championship, 110 points behind the title leader, Mercedes's Kimi Antonelli.

McLaren became a potential destination, perhaps as much a negotiating tool for Verstappen's management with Red Bull as anything else, with a purported switch between McLaren's Oscar Piastri and Verstappen being floated and the McLaren CEO, Zak Brown, admitting any team would be remiss were they not to consider the possibility of signing Verstappen. However, these rumours were ultimately given short shrift by Brown, who insisted they were happy with their lineup of Lando Norris, the world champion, alongside Piastri.

The Dutchman has long said he would like to see out his career with Red Bull, whom he joined as part of their driver programme in 2014, before joining their sister team, Toro Rosso, in 2015 and being promoted to Red Bull early in the 2016 season.

While his options for a new team were limited, his dislike for the new regulations and the emphasis they place on energy management was painfully clear, but with F1 and the FIA adapting them already for next year and beyond, and the prospect of the FIA returning to V8 engines with minimal electrical input in 2030, he has been swayed, not least in his faith in his team to turn things round.

"First of all, you need to feel good where you're at. Let's say, this year, if you are in the fastest car, but you don't feel well [happy], I don't think that's going to last very long," he said. "So, I feel very good in this team. I have the belief in the people that we can get back to the top. That's what we are targeting. I still want to win races. I'm hungry to win more."

For Mekies, who took over from Christian Horner in July last year, Verstappen is absolutely key in steadying the ship, not least in the driver's ability to bring the team on as well as wrestling the absolute maximum from the car, as the team principal acknowledged.

"What a demonstration of trust Max has put in the team by making this decision," he said. "We don't take it lightly; with that trust comes a huge amount of responsibility in living up to being able to give him the best package for the years to come.

"The role that Max has in the team, he's a lot more than the fastest driver in the world for us, he's the central point of the team."

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Women's World Cup

Maracanã hosts 2027's opening game and final

Tom Garry

The Maracanã in Rio de Janeiro will host the opening game and the final of next year's Women's World Cup. The 78,838-capacity stadium, which hosted the finals of the 1950 and 2014 men's World Cups as well as the finals of the Olympic football competitions in 2016, will be the venue for Brazil's opening Group A match on 24 June 2027, before staging the final on 25 July.

Brazil will also play group matches at the Arena Itaquera in São Paulo - which will host 10 matches at the finals, more than any other host city - and at the Estádio Nacional in Brasília. Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have been selected to host the semi-finals, with the latter also staging the third-fourth playoff. All eight of the stadiums involved in the finals staged matches at the men's tournament in 2014.

Belo Horizonte - the scene of Brazil's humiliating 7-1 semi-final loss to Germany 12 years ago - has been chosen to host a quarter-final. Fortaleza, Porto Alegre and Recife are also staging matches in the 10th official edition of the Women's World Cup and the second to include 32 teams, after the tournament, cohosted by Australia and New Zealand, in 2023.

"We can't wait to witness a new chapter of women's football history unfold when the world's best players, coaches, fans and local communities take centre stage next year," said Fifa's president, Gianni Infantino. "I already have goosebumps thinking about the incredible passion, colour and energy that Brazilian fans will bring to the tournament."

It is the first time the women's event has been held in South America and the Maracanã will join the now-demolished Råsunda Stadium in Solna, Sweden, and the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, as having hosted World Cup finals for both the men's and women's game.

▲ *Rio's Maracanã hosted the men's World Cup finals in 1950 and 2014*

Infantino eyes junior event as potential route to job security

Matt Hughes
Nick Ames

Gianni Infantino wants to split the European and North American coalition that is seeking to oust him by attending a junior tournament in the Dominican Republic this weekend in another gamble to cling on to power from the Fifa president.

The Guardian has learned that Infantino has made plans to attend the U14 Boys Challenge competition organised by the Caribbean Football Union (CFU), 21 of whose associations are voting members of Fifa, despite being urged to stay away from the event by senior figures within Concacaf - the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football - which is working with Uefa to remove him.

Infantino will come face-to-face with the man widely viewed as his most credible challenger, the Concacaf president, Victor Montagliani, if he follows through with his intention to travel to the Dominican Republic, whose FA invited him to attend before the World Cup sell-off plan emerged last month.

The Dominican Republic has since backed the joint Uefa, Concacaf and Asian Football Confederation statement calling for Infantino to hold an independent review of the Fifa Forward Enterprise proposal, as well as an emergency meeting of the Fifa council.

Infantino has largely fallen back on the support of his most steadfast allies by spending time in Morocco and Qatar as the storm has raged over the last month, but is understood to view the CFU meetings as a good opportunity split the Concacaf block and lobby for votes from the region's smaller nations before next March's presidential election.

Concacaf's most successful nation, Mexico, is defying the confederation by backing Infantino, who has also received support from two CFU members, Grenada and St Kitts and Nevis.

> ***Worldwide fans' groups have called for his resignation***

Infantino is also understood to have received a private endorsement from Panama, but it has yet to publicly confirm its position.

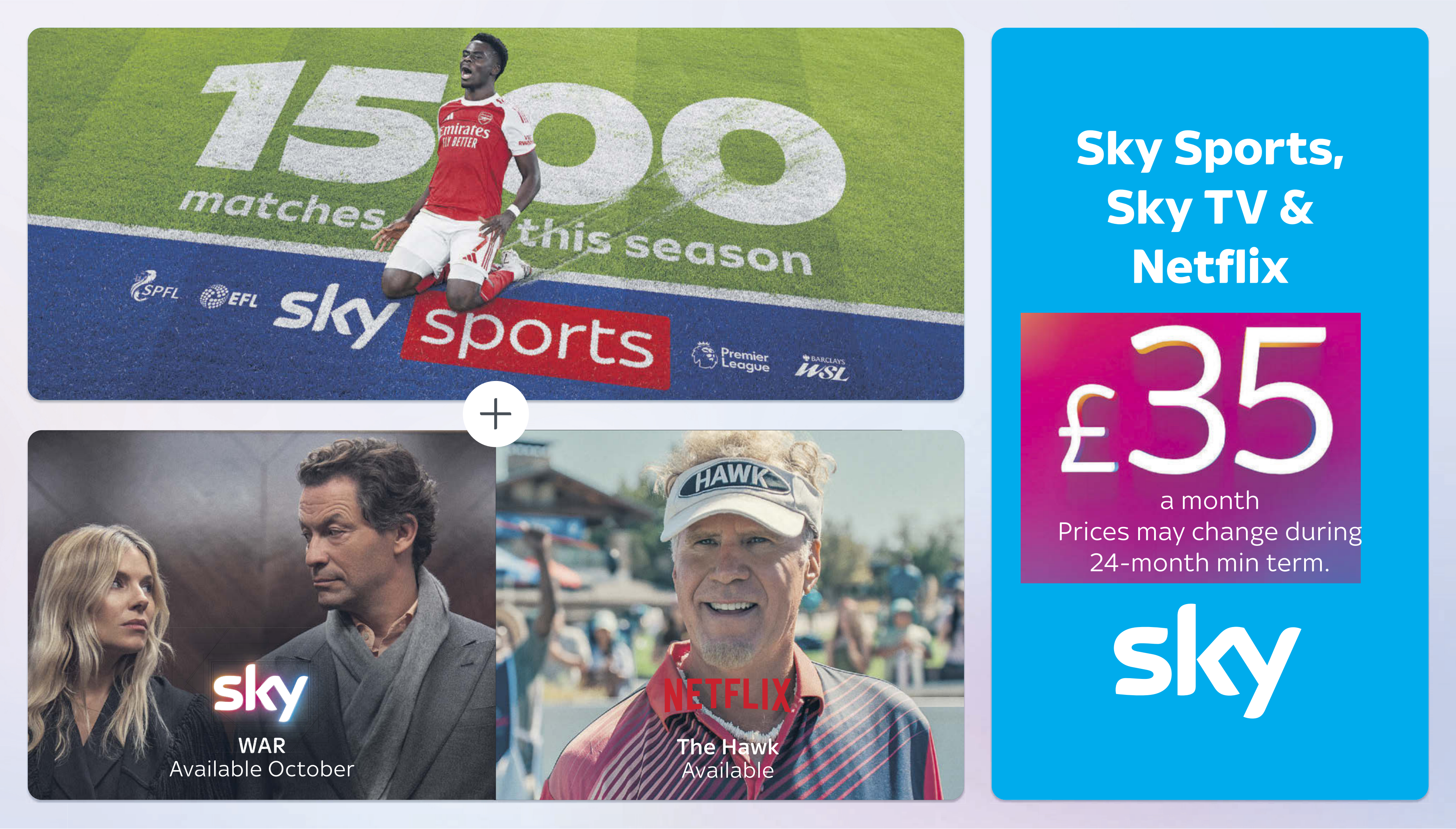
The Boys Challenge and CFU meetings are not Fifa events, so Infantino's plan to attend has raised eyebrows. Fifa declined to comment when asked about the president's movements.

Uefa, Concacaf and the AFC are continuing to explore calling for a vote of no confidence in Infantino, which would bring the matter to a head before next year's election.

Under Fifa's statutes, its council can convene an extraordinary congress at any time if 43 of Fifa's 211 member associations submit a written request specifying the items they want on the agenda, which can include no-confidence votes. An extraordinary congress must then be convened within three months, although the governing body's statutes contain no specific provision regarding a vote of no confidence in its president.

Infantino came under renewed pressure yesterday with worldwide fans' groups launching a petition calling for his resignation.

"The shameful attempt by one individual - the Fifa president himself - to sell off the World Cup to private investors exposed a betrayal football will never forget," a statement on behalf of the fan organisations said. "For the credibility of Fifa - and for the future of the game - he must resign."



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▼ *Caleb Yirenkyi will make his debut at Arsenal*
JACQUES FEENEY/GETTY IMAGES

Robots and drones: Yirenkyi's circuitous route to Coventry

Record signing is set to make a big impact after emerging from a Danish club willing to embrace a different kind of player, writes **Ben Fisher**

It is mid-July in Kössen, an Austrian village on the edge of the Alps, close to the German border, at Nordsjælland's pre-season camp. The Danish Superliga club's coaching staff, including Michael Essien, are preparing for the new campaign, the stunning scenery par for the course. Every session is recorded by a drone. The operator with the joystick in his hands? Well, that would be Caleb Yirenkyi, the Ghana midfielder who returned a week early from his post-World Cup break.

He requested to join his teammates in the drills, but after physios told the 20-year-old he required more rest Yirenkyi did the next best thing. It is a story that speaks volumes of his modest character and, a month on, he is poised to make his Premier League debut at Arsenal tonight after Coventry made him their £26m record signing.

Months earlier, Frank Lampard discussed Yirenkyi with Essien, his former Chelsea teammate, and Coventry beat off competition from top-flight rivals to make him their player after Ghana's last-32 exit in the United States.

Yirenkyi's story is another triumph for Right to Dream (RTD), the academy umbrella that, via the Mansour Group, owns Nordsjælland. Part of Yirenkyi's appeal is his versatility. After making his first senior start in February 2025, he started every league game for which he was available until departing this month, missing just three matches, all through suspension. He is predominantly a central midfielder but has played at right-back for his country and as a left centre-back.

At the start of last year, he excelled in a 3-1 victory over Manchester United in Altrincham (in front of a crowd of 334) en route to the Premier League International Cup quarter-finals, a tournament for under-21 teams. In Toronto this summer, Yirenkyi's 95th-minute winner against Panama in Ghana's Group L opener, a goal set up by his now Coventry teammate Brandon Thomas-Asante, made him only the second Ghanaian man to score on his World Cup debut.

Yirenkyi idolised Essien growing up and Essien's words of wisdom were priceless. "Sometimes I see some glimpses that remind me of myself when I was little," Essien said this year. Lampard sees those parallels himself and also shades of N'Golo Kanté's qualities; Yirenkyi won possession more times than any other player in the Superliga last season (205) and was crowned young player of the year.

Djimi Traoré, the former Liverpool defender, was another major influence. Traoré coached Yirenkyi at RTD in Ghana and quickly flagged his talent. Yirenkyi's biggest challenge was learning how to harness his power. He initially joined Nordsjælland's under-19s but regularly picked up yellow cards and was sometimes substituted to avoid the risk of reds. During a first-team camp in the Netherlands two years ago, Yirenkyi was pulled out of a training game because his desire to impose himself caused concerns he could injure key players a week before the new season.

Yirenkyi's time with RTD was transformative. Born in the town of Bechem, he joined RTD in Kumasi aged nine and arrived in Denmark aged 18 from their academy hub in eastern Ghana, about two hours from Accra, the capital. Alexander Riget, Nordsjælland's director of football, was under-13s coach when he first came across Yirenkyi in Ghana. "At that point he was not one where you thought: 'OK, he's the next superstar.' He was a very disciplined student and it was not clear that he would be a professional footballer. At that time, Caleb was also very good at building robots."

Robots? Yirenkyi spent his free time studying robotics, while enrolled on RTD's programme, which provides a pathway into football or further education scholarships. Such was Yirenkyi's focus, teachers had to remind him to take a break. He won a national prize as a 13-year-old and only the Covid-19 pandemic prevented him from competing in the world championships in the US. After joining Coventry, he was asked what he would do if he were not a footballer? "I'd build robots," came the reply. Flying the drone this summer, then, was a doddle.

There are plenty of tales that speak to Yirenkyi's humility. While in Denmark, he stayed at the club base during the off-season to achieve peak condition, and in 2024 he spent Christmas Eve with the family of the transitions coach, Thomas Kristensen, a former Denmark midfielder. "They had 26 guests at their house and Caleb was number 27," says Riget. "Thomas's grandmother is 85 but because of Caleb she watched every FC Nordsjælland game and now she will follow him at Coventry."

> ***'Caleb has been a joy to work with in this short time – he is going to have a really good career'***

"He has been a joy to work with in this short time," Lampard said. "I think there is going to be a big, big uplift in this boy … we believe he is going to have a really good career."

When Yirenkyi signed for Nordsjælland, he lived in one of 34 rooms on the club's campus. "He just wanted to stay, use his bicycle and be a professional footballer," says Riget. "Normally when players leave, we need to help them. But when our operations team went into Caleb's room, it was empty, absolutely spotless and he had left flowers and a card. He is a special character, for sure."

Lampard urges Sky Blues to play without fear at champions' home

Ben Fisher

Frank Lampard has urged Coventry to impose themselves on the Premier League, calling on his players to ensure they have no regrets after tonight's curtain-raiser against Arsenal.

Coventry play their first top-flight game in 25 years at the home of the champions, four months after celebrating the Championship title. Lampard, who last managed in the Premier League with Chelsea three years ago, acknowledges there is a step up in class to navigate, but wants his side to embrace the challenge.

"The last thing I would like to have after a game against Arsenal – or any team like this – is a regret of our approach and that we didn't give it everything," said Coventry's manager, who signed a new three-year contract at the end of June. "If we can do that as a team, then we will compete in this league and show teams what we are. If we don't, we'll be disappointed. I'll remind the players of that [before the game].

"I want to show in our performance and in how we approach the game that we haven't come into it with any kind of fear. We respect Arsenal greatly, but it doesn't mean you play with too much respect and you're passive. I want us to go there with the right mentality."

Coventry have spent about £130m on furnishing their squad this summer and targeted players they believe can handle the league. Six of their eight signings are at least 6ft, including the £26m club-record signing, Caleb Yirenkyi, and the 6ft 6in Switzerland centre-back Aurèle Amenda. Coventry's latest arrival, the 19-year-old striker Sidiki Cherif, joined from Fenerbahce this week.

"You have to be able to compete at a physical level to be successful in this league, in terms of running, physicality, size. The nature of set pieces is something we have taken very seriously in our recruitment."

No guarantees from Alonso on Fernández's Chelsea future

Jacob Steinberg

Xabi Alonso has refused to offer any guarantee that Chelsea will hold firm if Manchester City try to sign Enzo Fernández.

Fernández's future remains up in the air and the prospect of him leaving Stamford Bridge has not gone away, even though Chelsea's unofficial deadline for clubs to make written bids of £120m for the 25-year-old Argentina midfielder has already passed. City, who are also tracking Roma's Manu Koné, have targeted Fernández as part of their midfield rebuild after Rodri's move to Barcelona and are weighing up whether to make a move before the transfer window shuts.

Chelsea, who have identified Bournemouth's Alex Scott and Crystal Palace's Adam Wharton as possible replacements for Fernández, know the situation is fluid. The player has made no secret of his desire to leave the club and Alonso was noncommittal when asked if he would still be part of his squad at the end of the transfer window.

"Enzo is a Chelsea player," the former Real Madrid manager said. "He's a top player. He's training really well since he started 10 days ago with the team. Very integrated, and we are happy with him. He's getting ready for Monday."

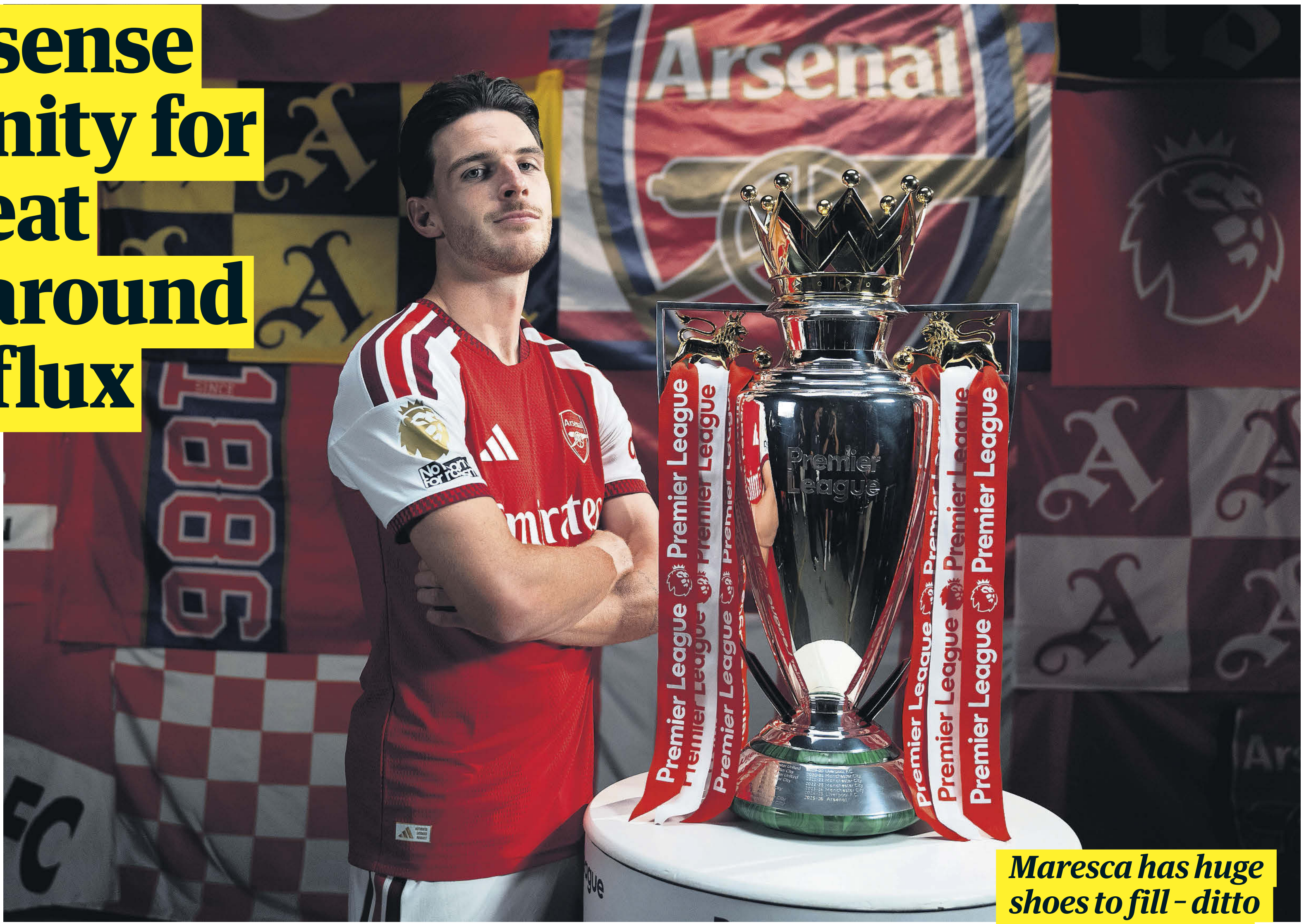
Chelsea open their Premier League campaign with a trip to Fulham on Monday night. Fernández is expected to be in the squad but Alonso dodged another question about whether the £106.7m midfielder has told him he wants to stay.

It has been another busy summer at Chelsea and Alonso must also consider whether keeping Fernández would sit well with supporters. Some booed him during the friendly win over Real Sociedad at Stamford Bridge last week. "He was not just booed, they as well chanted his name," Alonso said. "It's not unusual, it can happen. We support him. We have a great player with Enzo, he's a top player, he's been so important."

There was a reminder of Fernández's standing when he wore the captain's armband after coming on against Sociedad. Alonso could continue to use him as Reece James's deputy. "Reece is the first captain and we have other leaders, other personalities that share the same role," the Spaniard added.

▲ *Enzo Fernández (left) is in Xabi Alonso's plans against Fulham*

Arsenal sense opportunity for title repeat with all around them in flux



▼ *Declan Rice was key in ensuring Arsenal ended a 22-year wait for the title*
DAVID PRICE/AFC/GETTY IMAGES

New managers galore suggest many of the usual suspects will struggle to dethrone the swaggering champions

David Hytner

Mikel Arteta wants to get his messaging absolutely right. According to him, Arsenal are not about to defend their Premier League title. They are set to attack another one.

Remember Win the dog, who the manager brought in to the club's training ground? She must now be called "Won". But it is when Arteta quibbles over another bout of semantics that he highlights why he is entering the new season with such energy and optimism.

Do not talk to him about Arsenal's stability. He prefers the word "consistency" along with "ambition". The overall theme is clear. When Arteta surveys the landscape at the top end of the English game, he sees a settled environment at his club and flux elsewhere.

In terms of the so-called Big Six - the richest clubs in the country, as ranked by Deloitte - there are new managers at Manchester City, Liverpool and Chelsea; a virtually new one at Tottenham and a relatively new one at Manchester United. It has been a summer of unprecedented change in the Premier League with nine clubs with a new man in charge. Of those who hold out hope of a title challenge, only Aston Villa have a fully bedded-in manager in Unai Emery.

Rather abruptly, Arteta finds himself as the longest-serving manager in the division; he took over from Emery at Arsenal in December 2019. Emery is second on the list, having been at Villa for three years and nine months, and only one other - Daniel Farke at Leeds - has been at his club for more than three years.

When Arteta was given the job at Arsenal, Pep Guardiola was two titles into his storied City tenure, Jürgen Klopp had won the Champions League at Liverpool and was on his way to winning the league that season and José Mourinho had just joined Spurs.

Arteta has seen them all off, with Guardiola's departure from City at the end of last season being the most significant single shift in the dynamics for the campaign.

Arteta is now the big beast, the only current manager to have won the Premier League, and as Arsenal prepare for the curtain-raiser at home to Coventry tonight, it is hard to ignore the confidence they are projecting. With virtually of all their rivals in transition, uncertainty undercutting the excitement, predictions difficult to make in the face of little actual evidence, Arsenal are reassured by their firm foundations. They sense opportunity, another title; the creation of a dynasty. That is the ultimate goal.

There is something more. Namely how everything changed for them in the closing weeks of last season. City had done the hard work, clawing back a nine-point deficit from the middle of March - a period when they had a game in hand. But in the five-match shootout that followed, City blinked first, drawing at Everton. Most know how nerve-racking it was for Arsenal. Not least Arteta. The Emirates Stadium was a sea of anxiety when Arsenal last played there - against Burnley in the penultimate game of the season. They got a 1-0 win over the line.

Then City drew at Bournemouth and it was over; Arsenal's 22-year wait, the oppressive weight. It is plain Arteta and his players will feed off it and perhaps it will lead to a more expansive style of football. The fear of falling short inhibited their game as the heat rose last time out.

Arsenal have made changes behind the scenes, looking for the marginal gains, most notably in the medical department. If the players can stay fitter for longer, Arsenal believe they can stay ahead. They have protected themselves with moves to deepen an already well-stocked squad. Bruno Guimarães is the most eye-catching addition, with Ezri Konsa about to follow.

Maresca has huge shoes to fill - ditto Elliot Anderson, who City have bet the house on

Arsenal versus City still feels like the primary head-to-head. Guardiola had Arteta's number last season, winning two and drawing one of the three meetings between the clubs. But that was under Guardiola and that was with Rodri and Bernardo Silva. If Guardiola's exit has hit City the hardest, then those of the commanding midfielders is not far behind.

City's faith in their new manager, Enzo Maresca, is rooted in what they saw of him when he worked

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Carrick rejects 'ridiculous' idea United have an easy start

Jamie Jackson

Michael Carrick has dismissed suggestions that Manchester United's opening two games against Hull and Ipswich represent a favourable start to the season.

United travel to Hull for tomorrow's opening match before hosting Ipswich a week on Sunday. Both sides were promoted from the Championship.

Carrick is adamant neither game will prove easy. "For all of us to know this league, there's no favourable start, I think it's a tough start," he said. "A promoted team away from home is a tough game. I've been involved in them in the past so I'm fully aware of what's coming at us on Saturday, what we've got to be ready for. So it's not favourable. It's an easy thing to throw out there. But it's pretty ridiculous in a certain way, [we are] not taking it that way at all."

Carrick guided United to third last season after taking interim charge in January. He became permanent manager four months later on the back of his success in the role. He was asked if leading United to the title this season is a realistic ambition. "It is going to be a jump," said the 45-year-old. "I would never say we can't - I don't believe that. But it's about what we are capable of doing as a group.

"The run of form we had last season gives us a lot of confidence, but we know there is a whole new step to make. We are pushing to do that. It's exciting. We have the potential to achieve things and we will definitely give it everything we can. We have to believe we are a good team and can do good things."

United are hopeful of signing the midfielder Carlos Baleba from Brighton for less than £75m and remain in the market for a left-back. "We are looking to strengthen the squad, working towards that," Carrick said. "We are trying to make the most of the opportunities to finish the window stronger than we went into it and are in a good way to doing that so far."

Michael Carrick's side start at Hull tomorrow and then host Ipswich

Carrick praised Marcus Rashford's attitude and condition after his return to training amid uncertainty over his future at his boyhood club. "It's been pretty obvious since Marcus came back training with Kobbie [Mainoo] and Licha [Martínez] pretty much in Dublin that he's come back fantastically well," he said. "He's enjoying his football, he looks fit, he looks sharp, he looks strong, he looks ready to play football. So I've been delighted with him since he's come back."

Mason Mount's availability for the trip to Hull is in the balance due to a knock.

on their coaching staff; he was an assistant to Guardiola in the treble-winning season of 2022-23. Previously, he coached the Under-23s to the Premier League 2 title in 2020-21.

It is a well-thought-through appointment; the kind a well-run club makes. Yet, it is not one to quicken the pulse. Maresca has enormous shoes to fill. Ditto Elliot Anderson, the impressive young midfielder upon whom City have bet the house. Can City be better given the personnel losses? They must surely do so given the direction of travel at Arsenal. City do retain the cheat code that is Erling Haaland.

There are parallels between City and Liverpool, who want their new manager, Andoni Iraola, to have a similar impact in his first season that Arne Slot managed in 2024-25. Slot took Klopp's team and glided to the title. Maybe consistency in the dugout is not everything?

Liverpool have moved on Andy Robertson, Ibrahima Konaté and, most crucially, Mohamed Salah, even if he was a shadow of his former self last season. Salah has not yet been replaced; it would impossible to replace the prime-years version of him and Iraola, who has a number of injury concerns, has it all to do.

Coaxing more from Florian Wirtz and Alexander Isak is fundamental. Iraola's style has the capacity to hold Anfield in thrall; the aggression, the front-foot slickness, the boldness to go one-versus-one all over the pitch. How quickly can he impose it?

Chelsea will be interesting under Xabi Alonso, who has been allowed to add players to fit into the 3-4-2-1 he used to such stunning effect at Bayer Leverkusen. Alonso has also been permitted to break from the club's youth-first signing model and bring in much-needed experience.

Morgan Rogers, alongside Cole Palmer and behind João Pedro, with Moisés Caicedo and maybe Reece James in the deep midfield roles, has a very nice feel to it. There is talent in central defence. The lack of European football will be a temporary blessing.

Ask any chief executive what supporters want at the start of a season and the answer is invariably the same: be better than last season. Which will not be a problem for Chelsea after the implosion to limp home in 10th. Or Spurs, who finished 17th for the second campaign in a row and narrowly avoided relegation. Roberto De Zerbi, who was appointed as the manager with seven games to go, kept them up and the new hierarchy have been determined to act decisively. Their heavy spend on Premier League-proven players has allowed the fanbase to dream.

De Zerbi is a man to generate buy-in. Ditto a midfield that will feature Sandro Tonali and Mateus Fernandes. With Conor Gallagher or James Maddison expected to fill the No 10 role, Spurs look to have a proper unit to hold things together. They will also benefit from no European football.

What about United, for whom everything suddenly came together after the appointment of Michael Carrick in January, initially for an interim spell? His record meant the club had to give him the job on a permanent basis – he finished the season with 12 wins and three draws from 17 league matches. It was 2.3 points per game. Transpose that over a 38-match campaign and you get 87 points. Arsenal won the title with 85. Are United dark horses for glory?

Concerns remain. Carrick was largely untroubled by injuries and when United have their best XI on the field they are a match for anybody. When they miss a few, they can flatline. United were always going to have to add a good number of signings this summer, particularly as they prepare to return to the Champions League. They have not yet done enough; the final week-and-a-half of the transfer window could be crucial. As Mike Tyson almost said, everybody has a plan until they are punched in the face by the Champions League.

Are Villa really about to take another step forward after the highs of last season when they finished fourth and won the Europa League?

It feels unlikely given the departures, headlined by those of Rogers, Youri Tielemans and Lucas Digne, with Konsa primed to go, too. Strangely, there is a whiff of transition about them. Indeed, it is possible to find reasons to fret about every team. Apart from Arsenal.

'We want to protect and develop them'

Continued *from back page*

why, when we can, we want to protect those assets as much as possible, develop them and make them extremely important for the club."

Arteta said Martín Zubimendi remains an integral part of his squad and he expects the midfielder to remain despite reported interest from Real Madrid. Zubimendi was outstanding for most of last season before losing his place to Lewis-Skelly, but Arteta said he has reassured the Spain international that he still has a big role to play at the club. "I had various conversations with him. First of all, for him to understand my decisions, he knew perfectly where they were coming from and he's an extremely honest and straight guy. He's so demanding of himself that sometimes it can be too much.

"But he knows that and that we were going to add and increase the quality of the squad. Because it has to happen in every position and we cannot not do what we did. When he got to the last stage of his season, he already played 55 games. We cannot have that again at this level. He recognises that. Now it's going to be: 'OK, how I'm going to now raise the level to be able to do what I did last year. But for 11 months.'"

▼ *One of the nine new managers is Palace's Pierre Sage*

New for 2026-27
What's different for this Premier League season?

1 Law changes
If a player uses more than five seconds to take a throw-in or goal-kick the referee can choose to reverse the throw-in or award a corner. If a player is injured and play stops as a result, they must leave the pitch for one minute unless a foul led to the injury. If there is a tactical timeout caused by a goalkeeper going down injured, the manager must choose another player to leave the pitch for one minute. Substitutions will also need to take just 10 seconds; if a player takes longer than that to leave the pitch, his replacement will not be able to come on for a further minute. Video assistant referees will now be able to intervene on second yellow cards if they have been shown in error. VAR will also be able to get involved where an attacking foul happens before a set piece is taken which leads to a penalty, goal or a disciplinary sanction. They will be able to order for the set piece to be retaken.

2 Managerial appointments
There is a record nine new managers: Marco Rose (Bournemouth), Xabi Alonso (Chelsea), Pierre Sage (Crystal Palace), Álvaro Arbeloa (Fulham), Gary O'Neil (Ipswich), Andoni Iraola (Liverpool), Enzo Maresca (Manchester City), Matthias Jaissle (Newcastle) and Oliver Glasner (Nottingham Forest)

3 Five big signings to watch
Morgan Rogers: Aston Villa to Chelsea. Bruno Guimarães: Newcastle to Arsenal. Gonzalo García: Real Madrid to Fulham. Thomas Meunier: Lille to Sunderland. Elliot Anderson: Nottingham Forest to Manchester City.

4 New kids on the block
Ipswich won promotion in 2024 before being immediately relegated the following season. Kieran McKenna brought the club back up but will not be joining them in the top flight, though, as he stepped down from his role and been replaced by O'Neil. For Hull, their last top-flight season was in the 2016-17 campaign and their first season in a decade will be overseen by the Bosnian Sergej Jakirovic, who steered them to an unexpected promotion last season. Coventry have spent 25 years out of the top flight, and even dropped down to League Two, but have fought their way back, with Frank Lampard engineering their Championship-winning campaign.

5 Broadcast changes
Sky Sports and TNT Sports will remain the live broadcasters in the UK, with the BBC bringing highlights on Match of the Day, but there are some slight changes. The Premier League will allow on-field discussions between players and referees to be aired during live broadcasts. This will be trialled first and will not be present during the opening weekend. Match of the Day will feature new pundits in the shape of Thomas Frank, Toby Alderweireld, Robbie Keane and Ashley Young. The BBC will no longer be airing their fantasy Premier League podcast Fantasy 606. **Sarah Rendell**

Jaisslee puts faith in youth and tries to banish negativity

Louise Taylor

Matthias Jaissle has insisted that Newcastle's new crop of "under pressure" young players command his "full confidence" and hopes that supporters and reporters will start exhibiting similar belief.

The German is preparing for his first Premier League game, at St James' Park on Sunday, when Liverpool are the visitors. While the former Newcastle striker Alexander Isak – who left for £125m last summer – is expected to lead the visitors' attacking line, Jaissle could give competitive debuts to up to three of his club's four summer signings who are aged 20 or under.

"When you have young players it's good that you don't put even more pressure from outside on them," said Jaissle, who now looks heavily dependent on Bazoumana Touré, Aladji Bamba and Sean Steur. "They have already a lot of pressure, stepping up to goals they are maybe not used to at the moment.

"[But] from my side they have full confidence and commitment and trust and respect for the journey ahead of them – and it would nice if the fans and the media could see it in the same way."

This week, the former RB Salzburg and Al-Ahli manager said everyone was against Newcastle, but now the 38-year-old is pondering how best to use this to his advantage. "It's smart from us to avoid the negativity from outside ," said Jaissle. "You read the newspapers, the media, the social media in particular."

Only a fortnight into the job, at the end of a summer in which Newcastle have lost Anthony Gordon, Sandro Tonali and Bruno Guimarães to Barcelona, Tottenham and Arsenal respectively, Jaissle acknowledges that a team expected to be strengthened by at least one more signing in the coming days is "not 100% yet".

Asked what percentage they were up to, Jaissle turned a little coy. "I'm not good in mathematics, so I can't tell you that," he said. "But, for sure, there's a gap to reach our full potential. That's normal when you consider the circumstances around us. We are smart and realistic. But we are also ambitious."

While Amar Dedic has at least arrived on Tyneside and will start at right-back after a £30m move from Benfica, Jaissle offered no hints as to the identity of Isak's marker on an afternoon when, after both sets of fans pay tribute to the late Kevin Keegan, the Sweden striker will be braced for an extremely hostile reception. "I like Isak a lot," said Jaissle. "He's pure quality as a player. I don't know him as a human being but the important thing is that our lads just focus on themselves."

The manager was delighted at Newcastle's long-awaited announcement yesterday that, subject to planning permission, they will move into a brand new, £190m, training facility at Woolsington Hall, near Newcastle airport, for the 2029-30 season.

More immediately, Jaissle is spending most of his time at the team's current training base in the city's Benton suburb. "I consider the training ground at the moment as my home, which is normal and fine at this stage," he said. "The new training ground will be a world-class facility and will set the standards for this ambitious club."

Not that his transition from life in Jeddah has been completely devoid of culture shock. "The biggest challenge is the dialect of some of your [journalist] colleagues and the driving on the left side," he said.

Right now Jaissle is thinking only of Sunday and a poignant day in Newcastle's history. "You cannot really describe what Kevin Keegan did for this club," he said. "He is the reason why it is on this level right now. He is a legend at Liverpool too, so this combination is special."

▲ *Matthias Jaissle said it had been hard to adjust to driving on the left*

TNT Sports offers Saturday show on YouTube

TNT Sports will make the first 30 minutes of their live Premier League broadcasts available on YouTube this season, starting with Manchester United's visit to Hull tomorrow.

The pre-Premier League show EKO – Early Kick Off – will be available free-to-air for the first time, as well as on TNT Sports and the streaming service HBO Max.

Presented by Liam MacDevitt or Olivia Buzaglo, EKO will start at 11am and feature the early team news from the game, which is released 75 minutes before kick-off, and the pre-match thoughts of TNT's main pundits. The Saturday lunchtime live games kick off at 12.30pm on TNT and HBO Max.

In another departure for TNT, EKO will be broadcast before all of their live Premier League games this season rather than just before their Saturday lunchtime kick-offs, as was the case last season. TNT's coverage of an 8pm Saturday kick-off will begin with an EKO programme starting at 6.30pm.

The 30-minute show will have a magazine-type tone and feature discussion of wider issues in an attempt to broaden TNT's audience. Matt Hughes

Scoreboard

Headingley England lead Pakistan by 195 runs with two first-innings wickets remaining.

Pakistan First innings 171 (Abdullah Shafique 61; OE Robinson 5-51; JC Tongue 5-46).

England First innings		Balls	4s	6s
JM Cox c Mohammad Rizwan b Ali Usman	**73**	100	14	0
***JE Root** lbw b Khurran Shahzad	**66**	112	10	0
HC Brook b Ali Usman	**91**	93	13	0
DW Lawrence c Mohammad Rizwan b Ali Usman	**51**	79	9	0
†JL Smith not out	**16**	35	2	0
AAP Atkinson lbw b Ali Usman	**3**	15	0	0
OE Robinson b Ali Usman	**0**	1	0	0
JC Archer not out	**0**	3	0	0
Extras (b4, lb9, nb5)	**18**			
Total (for 8, 82 overs)	**366**			

Fall cont 198, 202, 322, 356, 364, 364.

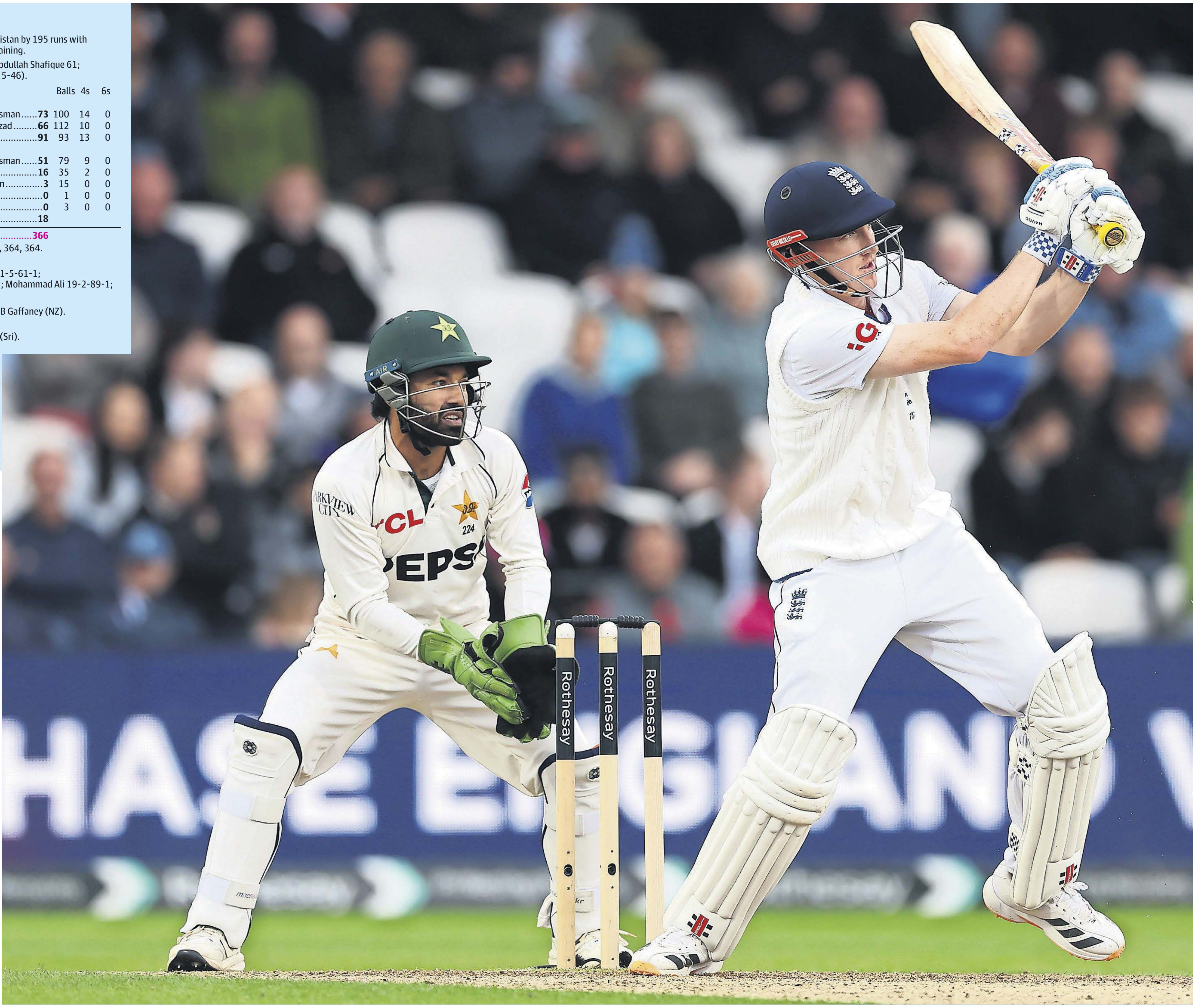
To bat J C Tongue.

Bowling Mohammad Abbas 21-5-61-1; Khurran Shahzad 19-1-111-1; Mohammad Ali 19-2-89-1; Ali Usman 23-1-92-5.

Umpires A Paleker (SA) and CB Gaffaney (NZ).

TV umpire PR Reiffel (Aus).

Match referee RS Madugalle (Sri).



▶ *Harry Brook, watched by Mohammad Rizwan, hits out on his way to 91 from 93 balls*

STU FORSTER/GETTY IMAGES

Frustration for Brook but patient England in full control of Pakistan

Vice-captain falls nine runs short of a first Test century on his home ground

Ali Martin
Headingley

The clock had just ticked past 7pm, there was still half an hour of play left on this soggy second day, and it looked for all money that Harry Brook would end a year-long wait for his 11th Test century with a first at his home ground of Headingley.

Brook had agonisingly missed out by one run against India here last summer. And this time, against a ragged Pakistan side that had handed him a life second ball amid another outing to forget, the box was practically begging to be ticked.

And then it happened. With 91 runs to his name, Brook rocked back and went to push the left-arm spin of Ali Usman through vacant midwicket only to swipe at fresh air and hear the ball cannon on to his stumps. Brook came into this match as the world's No 1-ranked batter but this particular local peak remains elusive.

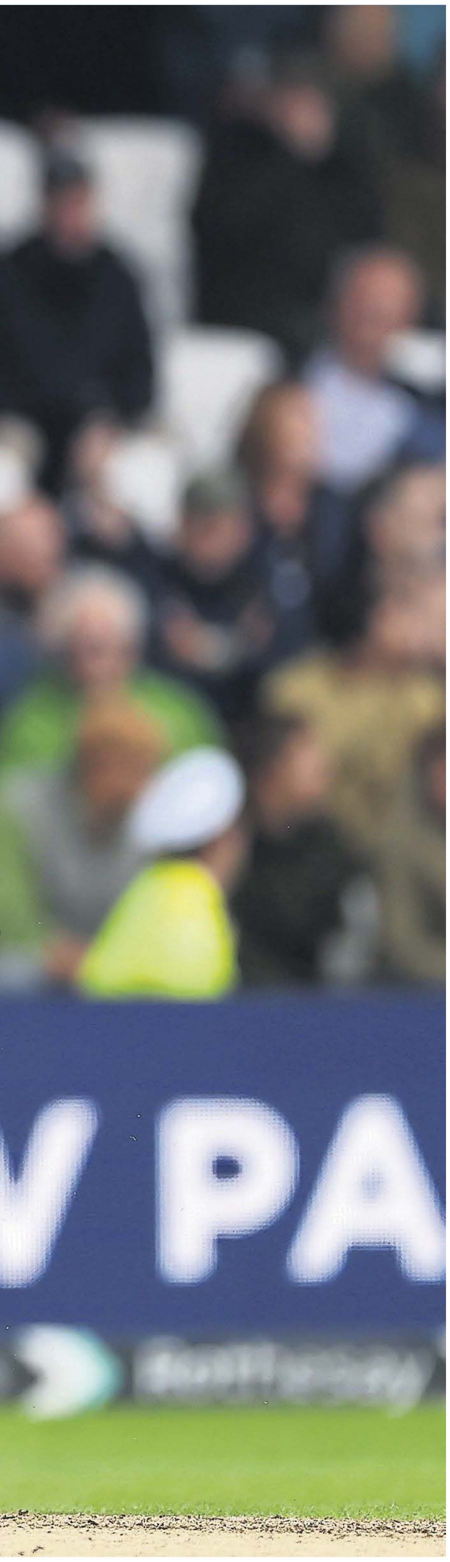
For all that Brook was cursing himself back in the dressing room, and Usman struck twice more before stumps, it was not hugely damaging to England's position. At stumps Joe Root's side had progressed to 366 for eight, and a lead of 195 runs, with victory inside three days not beyond the realms of possibility.

Saying as much is dangerous at a ground famous for its turnarounds, likewise against a team with a history of producing the unexpected. But across the 57 overs of play that were possible, as Root (66), Jordan Cox (73), and Dan Lawrence (51) similarly made unconverted half-centuries, it was hard to be upbeat about the tourists.

It was already looking a long way back for Pakistan after that ruinous first day at the hands of Ollie Robinson and Josh Tongue. But with a night's sleep, and rain halting the match until 2.45pm, they had time to regroup; time to think about what

▼ *Spectators take cover under an umbrella at Headingley, where play did not begin until 2.45pm*

MIKE EGERTON/PA



caused their own dismissals before harnessing helpful conditions themselves.

Unfortunately a side that came into this series amid low expectations managed to somehow fall short of even these. Across the two overcast sessions, floodlights at full beam, their quicks failed to match Robinson's relentless line and length, chances went begging, and their ground fielding was borderline slapstick.

Summing it up was Usman trying to stop a boundary with his boot at one stage and kicking it over the rope. Unathletic as this was, at least Usman was trying to cut off the boundary. At times this seemed beneath Mohammad Abbas and Mohammad Ali, two men who would doubtless expect better off their own bowling.

The daft thing was, Pakistan actually had a sniff here. Root and Cox had looked largely untroubled after resuming on 112 for two, a stand of 150 pushing England past parity and into the lead. Cox in particular looked so assured in his second Test, the new No 3 owning the space and feasting on a string of freebies.

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Harry Brook's ***number of Test centuries*** *– with the last having come 13 months ago against India at the Oval*

But when both men fell in successive overs against the run of play – Cox edging Usman behind, Root trapped lbw falling over to the previously wayward Khurram Shahzhad – England were suddenly four wickets down, just 31 runs ahead. Here was an opportunity that Pakistan simply had to grasp.

The same went for the wafted edge that Brook immediately sent into the slip cordon second ball, only for the stand-in skipper, Salman Ali Agha, to dive across Imam-ul-Haq and put it down. Agha left the field for treatment – embarrassment may have played a part here – and Brook scarcely looked back thereafter.

At the other end was Lawrence, a player handed another stab at Test cricket after becoming collateral damage during the Bazball experiment, and between them they put on 120 more runs for the fifth wicket. Usman was getting grip from the surface but struggled with control, while Pakistan's medium-fast seamers continued to toil.

A further opportunity came and went for Pakistan here, and once again the upshot was slapstick. Lawrence danced down to Usman on 37 and was struck on the pad, with the rebound presenting Agha with a chance to run him out from slip. But the throw crashed into Mohammad Rizwan's back as the wicketkeeper continued his appeal for lbw. Better awareness might have seen him get out of the way.

Lawrence fell trying to mow Usman over cow corner and sending it skywards off the top edge, the latest in a string of anticlimactic moments. Root could have started his second stint as captain with a century, while the effervescent Cox could have announced himself to the world.

But none of these near-misses compared to the collective sigh that met Brook's late dismissal. For all that he took just 55 balls to make his half-century, and had just faced 93 by the time Usman hit the timber, Brook had played a mature knock, guiding his 13 fours, rather than trying to smoke them, and looking switched on.

Despite being the best pitch in the country, and a place positively dripping in history, somehow this is Headingley's last men's Test match until 2029. Unless Pakistan can deliver the unthinkable with the bat second time around, Brook's wait for a century on his home ground is going to be a long one.

Analysis
Taha Hashim

Cox brings swagger and looks at home in unfamiliar No 3 role after waiting for chance to shine

When Jordan Cox was 19, playing in his fifth first-class match and unbeaten overnight on 167 for Kent against Sussex, he decided to set himself a new task. Cox told Sam Billings, his captain and an England international, that he would go past Billings' first-class best of 171. The top scores of other teammates were in sight, too. "I was just ticking people off," Cox said a few weeks later. "Having a higher score than Sam Billings and Joe Denly at 19, that's what got me going." Denly, an England No 3, had a best of 227. Cox finished on 238 not out.

Six years on, that confidence and bit of swagger made its way to Leeds, with Cox resuming on 23 after England's near-perfect Wednesday. There were no visible nerves, no rollerskates on the feet. A few gentle taps of the ground, a small shift on to the back foot and then plenty of time before he presented the middle. He looked on holiday while batting in only his second Test, and that too with the responsibility of building a first-innings lead at first drop. Joe Root, 167 Tests in, was at the other end and Cox did not look out of place alongside his captain. The pair have done a bit of this now. Just last week they were decked out in red, trying to launch it together in the Hundred. Strong Welsh Fire, strong England?

A first international ton was on. He wasn't going to be rushed by any of Pakistan's seamers, with no one in the visiting attack capable of testing his ability against the bouncer. When Khurram Shahzad went short against Cox, the ball came out wide at 76mph, the lack of fizz possibly catching the right-hander off guard: a half-hearted baseball swing offered the bowler a return catch he couldn't take. A near-identical delivery immediately followed, with Cox quickly learning his lesson to nail the pull for four. There wasn't much of a celebration when he reached 50, suggesting this was not what he had come for.

Ali Usman and some left-arm spin brought about Cox's demise on 73, a prod off the back foot producing an outside edge. He will have to wait a little longer for that landmark moment – but Cox has become accustomed to sitting tight. The 25-year-old has been one of the best batters in the country for a while but made his Test bow only in June. He should have made his debut in late 2024 against New Zealand, when he was going to take the gloves, but a broken thumb in the buildup cost him.

When Cox played at the Oval two months ago, he was left out for the next Test at Trent Bridge. Despite his pyrotechnics in the Hundred, he has played only a handful of white-ball internationals for England.

He may have to play the waiting game after this series, too. Cox is a fill-in for the injured Jacob Bethell, the golden boy of the English game. The Essex man is more of a No 4 or No 5, capable of playing a soothing tune – like he did here – but also blitzing it when the moment requires. So his major problem is obvious, with those two spots occupied by the two non-negotiables in this England side, Root and Harry Brook. "If you've got the No 1 and 2 Test batsmen in the world, I can't imagine I'm going to squeeze them apart," said Cox last year, acknowledging the challenge of finding a middle-order role.

Instead, Cox has made it clear he'll do a job anywhere. Open? Sure, he did a bit of that at Kent. Bat at No 7 without the gloves? That's what was asked of him on his debut. Keep? He very nearly did when Jamie Smith was on paternity leave. He could really sparkle at six but Dan Lawrence, with the benefit of his off-breaks, took that role yesterday, marking his return to the XI with a half-century of his own. For this Test and the next Cox has the privilege of No 3. The roles are ever-changing but the swagger remains.

Rothesay
Rothesay
Rothesay

▲ *Jordan Cox, playing in his second Test, made a fine 73 batting at No 3*

Missed chances

'We were hoping one of us would have kicked on'

Taha Hashim
Headingley

Jordan Cox was one of four half-centurions as England maintained control of the first Test against Pakistan – but there were a few regrets as no one reached three figures on day two in Leeds.

"We were hoping one of us would have kicked on and instead of make it just a hundred, make it 150, 160, 170," said Cox, who hit 73 in his first Test innings at No 3. "And then the game looks, not completely different, but it puts us in definitely a better position."

Nonetheless, England look primed to take a series lead. Harry Brook top-scored with 91 as Joe Root and Dan Lawrence hit 66 and 51, respectively, after rain delayed the start of play until 2.45pm. England closed on 366 for eight, extending their first-innings lead to 195.

Ali Usman was the one positive on another tough day for Pakistan, with the left-arm spinner claiming five for 92. "Hopefully, the boys can get 50 runs tomorrow," said Cox. "You never know, we've still got [Jamie Smith] at the crease there and Jofra [Archer], who can still give it a good whack. So hopefully 50-odd runs and then get to our work."

For Cox – who edged behind off Usman – there were mixed emotions as he missed out on a first international hundred, a score that would have been a serious statement while he fills in for the absent Jacob Bethell.

"I let myself down a tiny bit, but at the end of the day, you take 70, don't you? Once I got to 50, I got to about 60 quite quickly, and I was thinking, there's a chance here – just keep being disciplined. I definitely had it in the back of my mind thinking, you know, you've worked so hard, don't give this opportunity up."

Elsewhere, a Test comeback has been put on hold for Sam Curran after the all-rounder was ruled out of the rest of the English summer with a groin injury. Curran is an option England are considering as they figure out life after Ben Stokes.

The left-armer was not included in the squad for the first two Tests against Pakistan as he was not considered fully fit, but has been name-checked by Marcus North, the men's national selector, as an option to balance England's XI. He will undergo surgery today, ruling him out of the third Test against Pakistan, starting on 9 September at Edgbaston.

▲ *Sam Curran is having an operation today, ending hopes of a Test return*

Premier League kick-off

- David Hytner's preview
- Carrick rejects 'easy start'
- Coventry's robot-builder

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The Guardian
Friday
21 August
2026

Sport

Starting from scratch

Arteta demands 'desire and ambition' in title defence

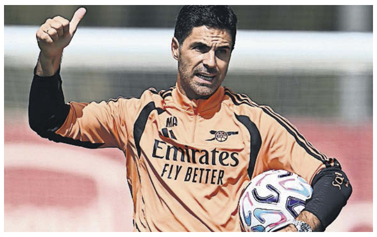
Ed Aarons

Mikel Arteta has called on Arsenal to prove they have the desire to defend their Premier League title on the eve of the new season. He also reiterated that Myles Lewis-Skelly will not be leaving in this transfer window.

Arsenal face Coventry in their opening match tonight as they attempt to retain the championship for the first time since the 1930s. Arsenal have won 17 of their past 18 matches against promoted teams and have not been beaten at the Emirates Stadium by one since November 2010 - a run of 45 matches.

While Arsenal are heavy favourites to start with a comfortable victory, especially after their impressive win over Manchester City in the Community Shield on Sunday, Arteta believes they must adapt to a different challenge this time.

"We need to take this organically because it's going to be a long marathon," he said. "What we need to show is that desire and ambition to be better than we were last season, a month ago, or a week ago when we played Man City. We have the ability to improve, to evolve."



▲ *Mikel Arteta said Arsenal 'have the ability to improve, to evolve'*

Asked whether Arsenal begin the season with a target on their backs, he said: "Today, no, because we start from scratch and we're going to have to prove we have the level to go back to that position again. But that happened in the last three seasons - at some point we were first, at some point we were chasing it, and you never know what's better.

"You give me the choice, I want to be first, I want to be hunted, and I want to be in control of our future, rather than depending on somebody else."

It is understood Myles Lewis-Skelly was offered to Manchester United and Chelsea as Arsenal attempt to raise funds after the £75m purchase of Bruno Guimarães from Newcastle. The 19-year-old academy graduate was outstanding in midfield against City and Arteta is "100%" confident he will remain at Arsenal.

"The players that have been raised in our system, and they feel that love and that connection, bring something else, there's no question about that," he said. "We need to look after them in a really special way because they bring value that is very difficult to find. That's

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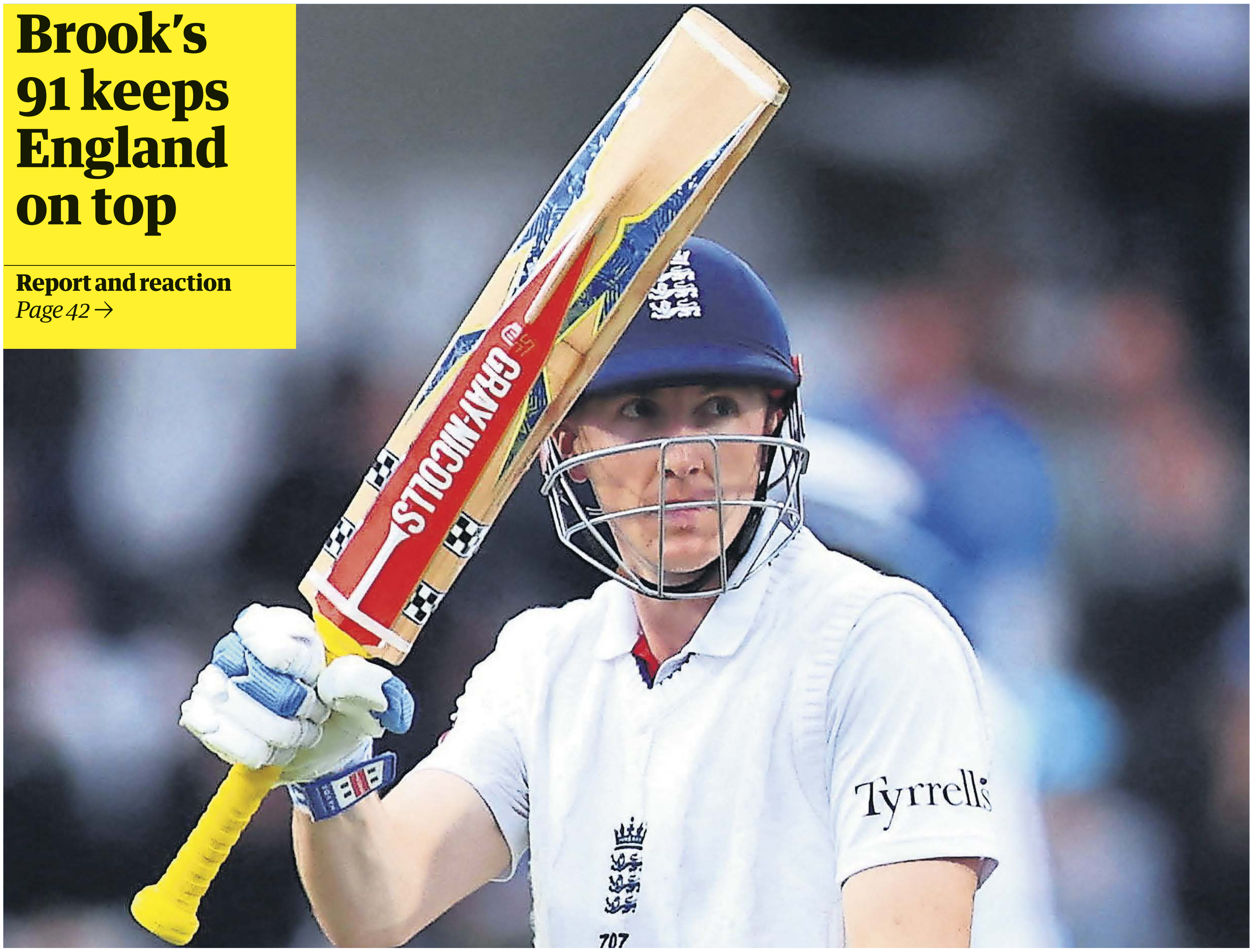

Brook's 91 keeps England on top

Report and reaction
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CRAIG BROUGH/ACTION IMAGES/REUTERS

Verstappen signs deal to stay at Red Bull until 2030

Giles Richards
Zandvoort

Max Verstappen has ended speculation about his future in Formula One by signing a new contract with his Red Bull team that will extend to the end of 2030, after almost 18 months of uncertainty around the Dutchman.

After being linked with moves to Mercedes and McLaren, Verstappen's commitment to Red Bull ensures that all the major seats in the leading F1 teams are now locked in for next year, just as the sport's silly season in terms of transfer speculation is beginning.

The four-time champion's future had been a subject of intense debate and not just in reference to switching teams. He had also seriously intimated that he might call time on his F1 career because he was so unhappy with how the new regulations have affected his enjoyment of racing.

When discussing the new contract going into his home race this weekend at the Dutch Grand Prix, the 28-year-old said: "I never felt that desire or need also to change [to another team] to try and win somewhere else," he said in Zandvoort. "If I feel well within the team here, why should I? Because I know that they do everything for me, and they know that I do everything for them once I'm on the track and trying to get the results."

Looking relaxed and in good humour as he faced the media alongside the team principal, Laurent Mekies, Verstappen expressed his confidence that his team would deliver despite their travails with the new regulations this season. "I think I was closer to retiring than changing team," he said with a laugh.

Verstappen's previous contract was set to run until the end of 2028 but was understood to include performance-based break clauses, which would have allowed him to leave had he chosen to do so, and while Red Bull have struggled with the 2026 rule

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▲ *Max Verstappen said he never had the desire to join a different team**